

Lone Motherhood, Welfare and Paid Work: Identities and Experiences.

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Abstract

Lone motherhood has long been a source of social, economic and political concern. With increasing family diversity and change involving patterns of parental separation and single motherhood, children are now more likely to spend some time in a lone mother headed family, compared with forty years ago. New Labour social policy has particularly raised concerns about the extent of poverty, low aspirations and disadvantage within these families. However, there is a concern that dominant discourses of alternative family forms present lived experiences in uniform and over-simplified ways. This study aims to explore the ways that lone mothers' understandings of their family responsibilities and support needs vary and the implications of their understandings for current policy and theoretical positions.

These questions have been addressed through data collected from a qualitative study in which forty-three mothers from various social backgrounds were interviewed, during the period 1999 to 2001. Using a framework that examined mothers' commitments and capacities in context, the study reaches two conclusions that offer a way of understanding the complexity and diversity of lone mothers' experiences. Firstly, lone motherhood is conceptualised as constituted through experiences and discourses relating to living alone, mothering alone, being single, parenting across households and parental separation. These aspects of lone motherhood did not necessarily occur together. Each aspect of lone motherhood could also provide varied social experiences and offer diverse sources of identity and meaning. Secondly, the complexity of lone mothers' experiences is demonstrated through the inter-relationships between individual life trajectories and biographies, the local context of resources and opportunities and the wider material and cultural context. Lone mothers' negotiated their actions, values and decisions in relation to these contexts. The conclusions raise several implications for current policy and theoretical developments.

Part One: Background To The Study

Introduction

The increases in lone mother headed households, parental separation and reconstituted families in the last thirty years have been defining features of social change in Western Europe. At the general level, intimate and family relationships are changing when compared to the dominance of a nuclear family norm in the immediate post-war years. Over the last forty years, we have witnessed a process of separation between sexual relations, marriage, parenting and co-residency compared with the nuclear family norm (Elliot 1996). This norm, which many note was more an ideal than a reality, is now very hard to take for granted as familial relations are visibly more diverse (Chambers 2001). Whatever the causes of change, the consequences for mothers, fathers, children and society in general have been the focus of much political and social concern. In the UK the issues have focused on the higher risks of poverty among lone mother headed families and the outcomes for children among different family formations. Comparisons have tended to focus on the differences and patterns between lone mother families and couple / married families.

However, as the following chapter will demonstrate there are many ways of viewing family change and assessing the differences and similarities between family forms. This thesis is concerned with analysing the standpoints held within New Labour social policy and lone mothers' own accounts of their lived experiences. The analysis focuses on providing a critique of current policy directions based on a framework of examining the qualitative nature of lone mothers' experiences and their perceptions of their capacities, commitments and support needs.

In many ways these questions arise within a policy context which is rapidly changing but shifting around some crucial distinctions between parental / state responsibilities in family life and the diversity / universality of parents' support needs. New Labour social policy has developed an array of reforms aimed at transforming the relationships between the state and families, as well as the nature of family support services. Lone mother headed families are the direct

target of some of these policy developments, such as the New Deal for Lone Parents and abolishment of the Lone Parent Premium on Income Support. These targeted policies have been justified on the grounds of tackling the welfare dependency and support needs required to enable lone mothers' to escape poverty, disadvantage and benefit dependency. These early policy developments in New Labour's first term of office signalled a rejection of passive dependency on welfare cash benefits, of rights to income security and extended the idea of the state as the enabler of 'opportunity, independence and responsible duty' (HMSO 1998: Cm 3805). 'Opportunity and independence' in New Labour terms involves notions of empowerment resting on participation in the labour market and economic self-sufficiency (HMSO 1998: Cm 3805).

Lone mothers' are also to some extent targeted by more general policies framed around the concept of social exclusion. The adoption of models of social exclusion / inclusion have expanded the remit of the enabling state even further as poverty is seen as a multi-faceted phenomena requiring a joined up solution across government departments. Here, programmes such as childcare services and family support are targeted towards groups and neighbourhoods with high numbers of lone mothers on a low income, living in social housing or at a younger age such as those targeted under the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy. There are also other social policy developments that aim to universally support parenting, childcare expansion and children's opportunities for early education. Among these policy changes then, are concerns about poverty, social exclusion, parenting, family support and children's opportunities. Key policy debates revolve around deciphering these issues, and gaining clarity over the factors shaping inequalities, preferences and support needs.

A crucial issue is the extent to which this policy context heralds an era of progressive public support for families? Do mothers' value such support and does it support their efforts to meet their children's needs? Do these policy developments reduce the inequalities among lone mother headed families? How does this new 'contract' for welfare and families sit against lone mothers' own understanding of their capacities and commitments? At one level the questions informing this study are those that aim to illicit mothers' own experiences, and

discourses of the risks, resources and opportunities shaping their lives and concerns. Examples of these questions are – What are mothers' own understandings and perspectives of lone motherhood? What are their priorities and concerns as lone mothers? Do these mothers have similar priorities and concerns? There has been a dearth of studies that have attempted to understand lone mothers' perceptions of their social worlds, children's needs and mothering. The study is also concerned with assessing the extent to which mothers' priorities and concerns differ among mothers themselves and between mothers and social policy frameworks, and explaining why this may be the case. Here the role of the individual, local and wider context in shaping mothers perceptions and actions provides a useful framework.

The subjective accounts analysed in this study are viewed as embedded in the personal, cultural, political and social context of modern lives. The mothers' own life experiences and capacities to interpret the world around them forms part of the analysis. There is also an attempt to acknowledge the force of cultural and socially diverse understandings of parenting and mothering. This involves critically placing lone mothers' accounts of family life and family practices in the context of mothers' changing social position and discourses of contemporary gendered identities, as well as examining the social structuring of mothers' experiences in terms of the local distribution of risk, resources and opportunities. This thesis will weave together an in-depth analysis of lived accounts, theoretical constructs and policy directions.

With this remit, the initial chapters set out the conceptual and methodological background to the study. The thesis begins with a review of relevant literature in Chapter 1. This chapter exemplifies developments in sociological and social policy research into the circumstances and experiences of lone mother headed families. Across these disciplines there have been theoretical and empirical debates analysing the nature and degree of social change shaping family life as well as the cultural / material; individual / social aspects of social processes. Theories influenced by the debates about difference, subjectivity and identity matters have particularly argued for recognition of the complex relationship between agency and social structures. When applied to debates around lone

motherhood that prevail among Governments and social policy makers / theories, there is a useful role for more sociological arguments to indicate the complex interactions between capacities, commitments, resources and constraints in mothers' decision making processes. Further, sociological arguments challenge the several assumptions about the uniform nature of mothers' concerns and experiences. Arguments put forward by many social theorists represent various claims about mothers' alternative conceptions of their commitments, capacities and needs as carers and paid workers (Duncan and Edwards 1999; Edwards and Ribbens McCarthy 2002; Carling, Duncan and Edwards 2002; Finch and Mason 1993; Williams, Popay and Oakley 1999; Irwin and Williams 2002). Recognising the complexity of the lived experience challenges us to rethink the relationship between rights, responsibilities and resources of support on an individual and collective basis.

Chapter 2 sets out the methodological influences on this study. Here I chart the methodological journey I have taken. Several personal, political, theoretical and methodological factors shaped the research process and outcomes. In this chapter many of these are considered and discussed. The specific data collection methods and analytical approaches are also set out.

The next four chapters are organised around central themes emerging from the process of data analysis. In Part 1, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 consider the pathways into lone motherhood and accounts of family change and continuities. Chapter 3 examines these issues of what it means to be a lone mother and what lone motherhood is. Several key dimensions of meaning are put forward which are lone motherhood as living alone, mothering alone, parental separation, being single or feeling alone. The ways these aspects of lone motherhood provided sources of identity and social positioning will be explored as they could express values, choices or constraints. Meanings could lead to claims for welfare support or autonomy and independence. These aspects of lone motherhood are shaped by some discernible social discourses that occurred across accounts and that are in line with previous conceptions of the discourses of lone motherhood (Duncan and Edwards 1999).

Chapter 4 provides an overview of processes of family change as participants recounted their journeys into lone motherhood. This chapter traces the similarities and differences across the data set as the mothers negotiate and represent their commitments, capacities and resources as they experience family change. The experience of becoming a lone mother can be represented in many ways - as a source of personal / social problems, a continuity, or a source of empowerment and transformation. Elements of continuity and change can be demonstrated. Change can be experienced at the level of family resources, family relations or self-identity. At a broader level, a number of discourses of lone motherhood can also be identified which mothers drew on in various ways. These discourses vary in their ideas about the risks and benefits of lone motherhood for mothers, children and society and differ in their positioning of mothers' responsibilities and rights for support / private choices.

Chapter 5 critically engages with processes of and representations of motherhood as a caring role. The mothers' accounts and understandings have been conceptualised as positions in relation to notions of good mothering and mothering alone. Some of the women expressed the significance of mothering alone as a context for their maternal practices while others resisted representing their circumstances as mothering alone. The moral nature of producing accounts of motherhood is demonstrated as all the mothers claimed to be prioritising their children's needs, although what these needs were involved diverse understandings.

Chapter 6 focuses on the relationship between motherhood and paid work. This chapter also considers the gendered moral rationalities in relation to the 'proper' relationship between motherhood and paid work among this sample. Differences emerge which as demonstrated in earlier chapters represent a complex relationship between values and resources which are shaped by individual biographies, the local context and wider material / cultural processes.

Chapter 7 examines these women's experiences in terms of negotiating, accessing and receiving / giving support. There are many similarities and differences between the nature and degree of support and resources between the

mothers. Crucial processes in accessing support also involved a complex interplay between what was the proper thing to do and the resources available.

The final chapter brings together the central themes running through the thesis and argues for recognition of the complexity of mothers' experiences, agency and meanings as lone mothers. Indeed there is a way through the complexity if we can acknowledge and engage with the ways in which mothers' understandings and actions seemed to be shaped by individual life trajectories, the local context and wider social, material and cultural forces. Their accounts of their experiences involved the interplay between the individual, the local and the broader social context. These levels of context form a framework for understanding the complexity and diversity of lone mothers' experiences. Theoretically weight does need to be given to issues of agency and social structures as mothers were engaged in negotiating their maternal identities, social positioning, values and resources. As policy only recognises some of these factors and contexts, there are many policy implications to these conclusions. This chapter critically assesses the contribution of this study of lone motherhood to current methodological, political and theoretical concerns.

Chapter One

Lone Motherhood, Social Change and Policy Shifts: A Critical Literature Review.

Introduction:

In this chapter current policy relating to poverty and parenting will be reviewed. The empirical and theoretical context for the study will also be set. The policy context is one of rapid change as New Labour has developed the most comprehensive set of policies and public services aimed at supporting and regulating family life and parental responsibilities in recent years (Millar 2003; Lister 1997; Lister 2003; Featherstone 2004). However, evidence from a number of empirical studies suggest that the provisions and discourses that these policies encapsulate can often fall short of mothers' own understandings of their support needs. There is concern that current policy frameworks fail to recognise the complex local typology of risks, opportunities and resources shaping mothers' decision making processes, perceptions of responsibility and capacities to fulfil those responsibilities (Williams 1999; Gillies 2003). The concern is that current policy developments can result in an authoritarian or coercive public intervention that fails, intentionally or unintentionally, to recognise the complexity and diversity of mothers' lives and priorities. Two key lines of questioning arise from this – what is the nature of this complexity? And how can policies, which can be blunt instruments of governance, recognise this complexity and support mothers in ways that can enhance their wellbeing? These are the questions that guide this study of social policies and lone mothers' experiences.

This chapter is organised into thematic sections. The first explores what constitutes a 'lone mother' and argues that the category is socially constructed, with the potential for a variety of meanings. The second section provides an overview of current family policy with particular reference to lone parents, poverty, social exclusion and parenting. The stated policy aims, mechanisms and services developed are recounted. The third section then goes on to review the evidence on which these policies are framed. This evidence relates to patterns of material disadvantage, labour market participation and social change. While

current policy reforms do in some way address many aspects of social change, there are also some concerns about the neglect of the complexity and diversity among parents' capacities, values and resources in relation to negotiating paid work and caring responsibilities. In many ways the research evidence informing policy has tended to focus on particular methods and theoretical approaches which has led to the neglect of other issues and claims for support and recognition that mothers have made. For example, issues of economics have dominated the research agenda. Here, lone mothers are constructed as primarily concerned with an economic rationality in relation to decisions around paid work, welfare, partnering or childcare (Duncan and Edwards 1999; Carling et al 2002). The role of the state in terms of conceptions of national policy have also been the focus of either the problem - as in the argument that the expanding welfare state led to a welfare dependency culture - or as the solution, for example, when the state is called upon to redistribute wealth (Lewis 1997; Daly 2000; Millar 1994). A further emphasis has been on the institutional barriers and constraints in balancing motherhood with paid work (Marsh, Ford and Finlayson 1998; Bradshaw and Millar 1991). This section goes on to illustrate the diverse evidence shaping policy concerns and highlights the existence of many gaps in the overall picture if we are to understand womens' experiences.

This overview signals the usefulness of sociological and critical / feminist social policy analysis of lone mother headed households, and also points to the complexity and diversity among this group and their circumstances. Recognising the play of the cultural and the material, the local and the national are key theoretical insights into this complexity and diversity. Finally, this section ends with a consideration of the tensions between the cultural, gendered and material relations of power at the level of the everyday experience of lone motherhood, leading to the aims of this study. It is a recognition of diversity and complexity in understanding the local context of risks, resources and opportunities shaping lone mother's agency and decisions that informs this study. From an understanding of womens' experiences several policy implications emerge in order to enhance mothers' resources and opportunities while reducing the risks and pressures.

1. Definitions of lone motherhood: What is a lone mother?

There are several terms used to describe lone mothers and their children. For example, the following terms have been identified during the course of this study:

- ◆ Unmarried mother, unwed mother, illegitimate children, out-of-wedlock children;
- ◆ Fatherless families;
- ◆ One parent family;
- ◆ Bi-nuclear family unit;
- ◆ Broken home;
- ◆ Lone mother family / household;
- ◆ Divorced mother, separated mother, never married mother and widowed mother;
- ◆ Mothers separated or divorced from marriage (ex-married lone mother); mothers separated from cohabitation (ex-cohabiting lone mother); Single never partnered lone mother; Widowed lone mothers;
- ◆ Single-parent family;
- ◆ Female headed households;
- ◆ Mother-only families;
- ◆ Mothering alone;
- ◆ Post- divorced families;
- ◆ Parent-child unit;
- ◆ Living alone with children;
- ◆ Sole major parent;
- ◆ Single handed parents;
- ◆ Solo parenthood;
- ◆ Single parent by choice.

Part of the diversity of terminology relates to historical and cultural changes reflected in the language used to describe family forms. Terms such as ‘fatherless families’, ‘broken home’ or the ‘unwed mother’ are now outdated and recognised as discriminatory (Crow and Allan 1999; Cheal 1999; Cheal 2002; Kiernan, Land and Lewis 1997). With the changes in family structures since the late 1960’s such as a decline in lifelong marriage, an alternative set of terms and language with which to talk about family lives has developed (Cheal 1999). The fashions of terminology in itself can lead to ambiguity and confusion in what each concept refers to.

There are at least three types of answers to the question – what is a lone mother family? The answers to this question also relate in significant ways to conceptualisations of ‘family’. The first answer tends to be found in official social policy definitions of a lone mother ‘household’. The second type of answer is that of viewing lone mother households as more than a living arrangement and towards a family form. The third answer, which is the view developed in this study, argues that the definitions above neglect the varied meanings and phenomena that can be referred to as lone motherhood. Categories of family form involve much more than mere descriptions of family relations or household arrangements. Distinguishing between family as an ideal, as a set of lived experiences and as an institution has been a key issue in recent family sociology. Further to enter the diverse world of lived experiences and to capture the processes by which family life is connected to wider power relations involves a need to deconstruct the concept typologies of family formations.

Lone motherhood as household type:

The official policy definition of a ‘lone mother’ is that of a ‘lone mother household’ although the gender neutral term of ‘lone parent household’ is more often referred to in policy debates (Millar 1989; Allan 1999; Crow and Allan 2001; Haskey 1998; 2002). A lone parent household, represents a living arrangement and household type category used to aggregate the population according to household membership in official surveys, such as the Census or the General Household Survey. A lone parent household is:

“a mother or a father living without a spouse (and not cohabiting) with his or her never married dependent child/ren aged under 16 or between 16-19 and undertaking full-time education” (Haskey 1998).

Using this definition, the number of parents living alone with their biologically related or adopted child/ren can easily be aggregated, in theory, as can household resources. This official definition is used to aggregate an overall lone parent population. Using this definition it has been concluded that there are more lone parent households today compared with 30 years ago and these households are over represented among the poorest households (ONS 2003).

Crow and Allan (1999) argue that the category of 'lone parent household' is a useful one as it provides a basic unit of analysis – the household – from which to establish broad demographic patterns. A measure of lone parenthood based on living alone with children can enable comparisons between lone parent headed households and other household types such as married couple headed households¹, cohabiting couple households², single person households or multi-person households (Crow and Allan 1999). Prior to notions of lone parent household, which emerged during the 1980's and its predecessor 'one parent household' popular in the 1970's, "there was no collective name for, or official set of estimates for one parent families" (Townsend 1979:754 cited in Crow and Allan 1999: 233). Investigations into lone motherhood as a household type could not begin therefore until a workable definition of this family form was established and characteristics aggregated (Duncan and Edwards 1999).

'Lone parent household' offered a way of assigning a generic term to mothers / fathers living alone with children. The emergence of a generic category in the mid 1970's was a response to much social criticism around the stigmatising and unfair treatment of different groups of fathers and mothers according to marital status. Derogatory terms such as 'illegitimate' children, 'fatherless' families, 'unwed' mother and 'broken' home, represented values that promoted marriage and couple headed families as the only viable family form (Land, Lewis and Kiernan 1997; Smart 1984). However, since the 1970's changes in attitudes towards lone parent families as a legitimate family form or at least one among an increasingly diverse plurality of family forms has been reflected in the language used to denote this household type (Cheal 1999). There has been a response to develop less emotive language that moved beyond the moral implications of deviance and failure in relation to marital or couple status (Land, Lewis and Kiernan 1998).

¹ A married couple household involves a husband and wife living together with their never married children (ONS 2003).

² A cohabiting couple household involves two people living together as a couple with or without children and not living with a spouse. Cohabiting couples in official surveys includes same-sex couples (ONS 2003).

Situated in the political context of the 1970's and 1980's, terms such as 'one parent family', involved claims to the universal needs of widowed, separated, divorced and single parent families (Finer 1974; Ferri 1984). These claims were of material disadvantage, as one parent families, especially lone mothers, struggled to provide financially for their children's needs (Townsend 1979; Ferri 1984; Finer 1974). The situation where widows were supported financially through welfare benefits; divorce was operated through a costly private legal system and unmarried mothers received little financial support was deemed unfair given the shared experience of material disadvantage (Smart 1984; Finer 1974). The Finer Commission, as well as lobby groups such as the National Council for the Unmarried Mother (which soon changed its name to the National Council for One Parent Families) and Gingerbread (from the mid-1970's), claimed that lone parents deserved public support due to the lack of household resources within these families. These included problems of housing security itself as well as low income and constraints in taking up employment (Finer 1974). The support offered to widowed mothers / fathers, but not to unmarried or divorced mothers/ fathers, was heavily criticised as based on outmoded Victorian distinctions between the 'deserving' innocent poor and the 'undeserving' pathological poor (Land, Lewis and Kiernan 1997; Rubington and Weinburg 2003). The Labour Government at the time, concerned with the material causes of disadvantage, established financial public support for the now generic category of 'one parent families' who were eligible for supplementary benefit, in the form of the additional guaranteed maintenance allowance (Crow and Allan 1999). It is important to recognise that the claims of material disadvantage and special needs of lone parent households emerge as much from grass roots campaigning as from state personnel / professional discourses (Crow and Allan 1999). The welfare support and legal rights that have since expanded does afford many women the possibility to leave unsatisfactory partnerships and maintain a (low) income. However, the terms of these debates were implicitly highly gendered, as it was the lack of a male breadwinner and a resident father figure that defined the 'problem of lone mother poverty' rather than the financial disadvantage women experienced in marriage and as unpaid carers (Land, Lewis and Kiernan 1997). The term lone mother / father headed household emerges from a political context whereby the household / and household membership was

seen as significantly patterning domestic labour and household resources within the bounded household / family unit (Graham 1984; Pahl 1984).

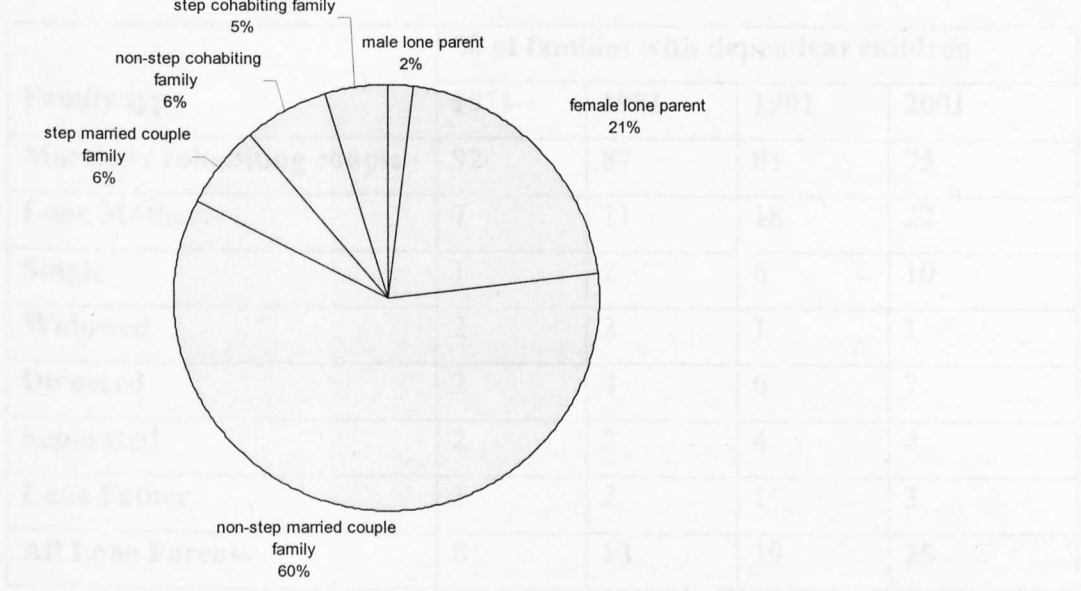
‘Lone parent household’ is viewed as a more accurate, objective and measurable definition of lone parenthood than lone parent family (Millar and Ridge 2002; Crow and Allan 2002). However, there are limitations with this definition. This is especially the case when we are examining lived experiences. Framing family life, family resources and family membership around the notion of the household is extremely problematic (Smart and Neale 1999; Morgan 1996).

There are several limitations with this definition, which revolve around the explanatory power and empirical accuracy of ‘the household unit’ in relation to ‘the family unit’. There are concerns over exclusions of some lone parents leading to inaccuracies in official statistics (Crow and Allan 1999; Haskey 1998; 2002). Official statistics do show a considerable rise in lone mother headed households and the incidence of lone motherhood over the lifecourse. It has been estimated that there are around 1.75 million lone parent headed households caring for around 2.8 million dependent³ children (Haskey 2002; Millar and Ridge 2002). This represented around 25 % of dependent children in 2002 (Family Resources Survey 2001/2 ONS 2003). This is in comparison to 66% of dependent children living in married couple households and 11% living in cohabiting couple households using the Census 2001 estimates illustrated in figure 1 below. Around 21% of these dependent children live in lone mother headed households as lone mothers make up 92% of lone parent households (ONS 2003). Lone fathers make up 8% of lone parent households and are more likely to contain older children (ONS 2003). However, these figures of the numbers of lone mother / father headed households mask much dynamic movement among families as couples separate, children leave the parental home and adults re-partner. Lone parenthood is predominantly a temporary family form with the majority of parents ‘exiting’ lone parenthood after around 5 years (Ermisch and Franseconi 2002). Taking account of the many movements in and out of lone motherhood, Ermisch and Franseconi have estimated that 40% of

³ A dependent child is defined as a child under the age of 16 or 16-19, in full-time education, residing in their parental home and not earning an independent income (ONS 2003).

mothers, and 1 in 4 children will spend some time in a lone mother headed household before a child reaches their 16th birthday (Ermisch and Franscesoni 2002; Haskey 2002).

Figure 1: Dependent children by family type 2001 (Source: Census 2001)



These figures represent a considerable rise in lone parent households compared with just a few decades ago. Steady growth occurred between the 1960's to early 1980's where the numbers of lone parent households grew at a faster rate. Between 1961 and 1986, the numbers of lone parent households doubled from 474 000 to 1010 000. However between 1986 and 1996, the numbers had increased threefold since the early 1960's. In 1996, there were around 1.6 million lone parent households looking after around 2.7 million dependent children. Since the late 1990's figures have shown that the rate of growth in lone parent households has slowed down again. Table 1 shows the decline in married couple headed families and the increase in lone mother headed families. In the 1950's marriage became increasingly popular with 90% of births occurring in marriage and divorce rates at 4 per 1000 marriages (Fox and Pearce 2000; ONS 2003). However, since the mid 1960's the numbers of lone mother headed households have increased. This has been particularly pronounced among divorced, separated and single never married lone mothers. Widows who constituted 1 in 4 lone mothers in 1971, in 2001 accounted for only 1 in 25 lone mothers (Haskey 2002). Although these figures put married and cohabiting

couples together, non-married cohabitation has increased from 7% of families to 11% between 1979 and 2001 (See Figure 1 above).

Table 1: Couple and Lone parent households / families with dependent children 1971- 2001

Family type	% of families with dependent children			
	1971	1981	1991	2001
Married / cohabiting couple	92	87	81	75
Lone Mother:	7	11	18	22
Single	1	2	6	10
Widowed	2	2	1	1
Divorced	2	4	6	7
Separated	2	2	4	4
Lone Father	1	2	1	3
All Lone Parents	8	13	19	25

(Source: General Household Survey 2001)

While the figures above contest to a three fold rise in lone parent households, Haskey has estimated that around 25% of young single mothers (under 20 years of age), especially teenage lone mothers, live in multi-person or shared accommodation with other family members such as their parents or siblings (Haskey 1998). Further in 1971, lone parent households may not have been so prevalent but one third of lone mothers lived with family members (Haskey 1998). The increases in the incidence of lone motherhood then must be understood in the context of wider changes in household formations and differences according to age. If we consider the many lone parents who are homeless, live in temporary accommodation or whose children are in care, there is room for further exclusions of many lone parent families from this definition of lone parent household (Graham 1984). Ambiguities also arise in the context of much diversity and fluidity in family living arrangements. Where parents live apart from each other (i.e. due to paid work commitments) or apart from their children for some of the time (i.e. due to boarding school) – are these families also to be categorised as lone parent households?

There are also concerns about slippage between issues of domestic organisation and living arrangements with issues of partnering and parenting (Neale and Smart 1999; Marsh and Perry 2003). Essentially, lone parent household can slip into notions of family membership based on measures of household membership, of family relationships based on household membership and of family resources based on household resources. Household membership does not necessarily indicate family membership. These issues lead to ambiguity over family members themselves understanding their family lives in alternative ways to official categories.

Smart and Neale (1999) argued that in their study of post-divorce parenthood, many of the parents went on to form lone parent households but only a proportion of these were *parenting alone* or in Smart and Neale's terms holding solo responsibility for parenting. For Smart and Neale (1999) post-divorce parenting could involve a number of configurations of parental authority and division of labour. These were solo responsibility, custodial parenting and co-parenting (Smart and Neale 1999). These categories related to the extent to which parental authority was shared after a married couple divorced and spouses lived apart. Solo responsibility relates to the resident parent making all the important decisions in relation to the children. However, contact with, or financial support from the non-resident parent could also be maintained. Custodial parenting is where the resident parent consults the non-resident parent but tends to make the end decision. Again in this configuration a relationship and financial support between the non-resident parent and other family members can be maintained. The majority of post-divorced parents in their study moved towards custodial parenting in the post-divorce period. Co-parenting led to the sharing of parental decisions, labour and organisation across households (Smart and Neale 1999). Many of the parents shared parenting in some form across households and several moved frequently between these configurations. Further some of the mothers and fathers reported a move towards shared co-parenting in the post-divorce period compared to a marriage based on fixed gender roles of mothering alone and providing alone (Smart and Neale 1999). In comparison to such in-depth analysis of lived experiences and family change, a notion of

parents either living together undertaking shared parenting or living apart and solo parenting becomes too rigid a model of family forms. Smart and Neale (1999) reinforce the idea that issues of parental authority, family resources and family relationships need to be separated out from issues of household membership and living arrangements.

This indicates evidence that boundaries around 'family' as a group can expand beyond the household and is increasingly likely to do so (Morgan 1996). A household refers to groups of individuals bound by a place – the physical structure of a house, it denotes a spatial group (Elliot 1996; Crow and Allan 2001). 'Family' is used in a much broader sense with layers of meanings around membership that can involve ties of intimacy, solidarity, marriage or biology that endure across spatial groupings. Membership is based on several of these dimensions rather than one such as marriage or household (Gubrium and Holstein 1990; Cheal 2002; Charles 2003; Allan 2001). Family relations can connect individuals across households, communities and countries (Cheal 2002). Lone parent households along with statistics and extensive research based on this measure of lone parenthood alone, can only tell us about household level resources and membership (leaving aside the issue of honestly reporting these household characteristics or varied meanings surrounding 'living together') – and hence offers a one-dimensional picture of family life.

Lone motherhood as a family form:

'Lone parent households' and 'lone parent families' are often used simultaneously (indeed I have done this on many occasions within this thesis). In many cases lone parent family is usually taken to really mean lone parent household. I employ the term lone parent families to denote inclusion of lone parents who may not have formed lone parent households. However, 'lone parent family' is perhaps even more ambiguous than 'lone parent household'. Lone parent family can be used to denote several dimensions of family life in these families beyond merely a notion of heading a household alone. For example, Finer expressed some of the accompanying ways that a lone parent is often thought to be 'alone' in the following quote when he said that a one parent family is a:

“family in which there is an adult and dependent child or children, one parent or partner is absent (for whatever reason), there is no reasonable prospect of his or her return within a fairly short period and there is no effective parent substitute” (DHSS 1974:39)

The ‘family’ can be used to discuss matters of parental responsibility, living arrangements, domestic labour, ties of solidarity / intimacy and partnerships. These issues actually offer distinctive frames through which to view family relations. Categorising and examining families in terms of marital status; household membership; adult partnerships; divisions of labour; support and family membership could potentially give very different pictures of family life even within one family. Issues of marital status are altogether different from aspects of the division of labour and responsibilities between a mother and father, as is household membership from issues of family membership. The problem then arises that many aspects of family life are brought together rather than examined separately.

The boundaries between categories, if we take any of these dimensions of family life – parenting labour / responsibility, marital status, partnerships, cohabitation or family membership – are problematic. Family members who do not co-reside may be involved in parenting labour and share the responsibility for children in some way. Research into parenting across households has illustrated many different styles of continuing co-parenting post divorce (Smart and Neale 1999; Maclean and Eekelaar 1997). Research on step-families have raised many questions about the boundaries between lone parent families and reconstituted families as even if a relationship leads to two adults cohabiting, this doesn't necessarily mean that both adults will be providing or caring for the children (Smart and Neale 1999; Ribbens-McCarthy, Edwards and Gillies 2002). Research into partnering and parenting has identified a number of family caring practices maintained across households (Smart and Neale 1999). Research that considers ethnic and class differences in family life indicate the fluid nature of friend / family networks often involved in childcare activities (Charles 2003; Wilson 1997; Reynolds 2002). The boundaries between cohabiting and not cohabiting within partnerships can also be unclear. Donnison and Ungerson

(1982) found that disagreement over what constitutes cohabitation has been significant in welfare disputes. Moreover, parenting alone may occur within the married nuclear family – especially if the father or mother works away from home for significant periods of time (McRae 1999). It is therefore unsustainable to view lone parent households as necessarily involving mothering alone or even singledom as this is based on an idealised view that cohabitation equates with sharing and equality in couple headed families. The many shades of grey that occur between mothering alone and shared parenting in many couple and lone parent households is hidden as well as the shades of grey between non-cohabiting and cohabiting partnering. Rimmer highlights the lack of research about the role of the non-resident parent, who is usually the father, in lone parent families along with the role of significant adults acting as additional mentors to children in these families (Rimmer 1983). A quantitative figure of the degree of contact between non-resident and resident parents remains illusive as is the partnering patterns of parents living alone with children (Bradshaw 2002). The key issue then, is one of recognising the complex inter-relationships between family membership, family ties and resources.

Some of these problems can be overcome by accurately referring to issues using more specific terminology. This is what Cheal has called ‘concept specification’ (Cheal 1999). For example, lone parent household refers to patterns of household membership where a parent or carer lives alone with their children (Gonzalez 2002). Mothering alone and fathering alone more accurately indicate issues of the division of caring / providing labour and responsibilities. Separating out these issues allows for questions about labour and responsibility to be asked as well as household analysis. Smart and Neale (1999) argued that some married couples, once divorced, moved from the traditional gendered division of labour where a mother has authority and labour responsibilities around caring and the father has authority and responsibilities in different tasks, towards the sharing of these tasks and authority (Smart and Neale 1999). Developing and sustaining co-parenting often required investments of time, emotional labour and sacrifice. New partners and children need to be juggled with childcare /maintenance commitments from a previous marriages (Smart and Neale 1999). Examining these aspects of family change can provide a more specific analysis.

The discussion so far has focused mainly on issues of conceptual clarity as 'lone parent household' has come to be recognised as limited in relation to explaining what relationships and memberships make up a 'family' on the terms of family members themselves. Duncan and Edwards have claimed that 'lone motherhood' is a chaotic concept with little utility in describing or explaining family relationships, values or actions (Duncan and Edwards 1999). This point equally relates to the limitations of using a notion or typology of family form to explain family life. 'Lone parent family' has also been criticised for the vagueness of what 'lone' is referring to. Alternative conceptual frames have been introduced such as mothering alone, living alone, parental separation, parenting across households and partnership status. In order to investigate family relationships we need to 'open up the black box of lone motherhood' and ask questions about family practices, family values and family resources within lone mother headed households (Duncan and Edwards 1999). This brings us to apply a theoretical framework which addresses the socially diverse, situated and constructed nature of meanings of lone motherhood.

Lone motherhood as involving socially constructed categorisations of family formations:

Social constructionists would consider terms such as 'lone parent household / family' or 'lone mother household/ family' (along with many other categories of family type such as divorced mother, separated mother, never married mother and so on) as more than descriptions of household type. Rather than merely describe social reality, a social constructionist epistemology would assert that these categorisations of 'family' assign values and meanings in ways that normalise and homogenise particular family circumstances. Categorisations of family forms reflect administrative definitions, value based assumptions and culturally situated language and understandings (Cheal 2002). A process of meaning construction is involved. These processes through which meanings of the family are constructed and contested also involve the circulation of wider social narratives about lone motherhood and the family. What emerges is the possibility of several meanings and identifications with a notion of lone

motherhood as this is constructed as a form of difference or deviance from the culturally assumed norm.

There can be differences between legal / social policy notions of lone motherhood and subjective meanings. For example, if we look at categorisations based on marital status, which also form the basis of official statistics, research questions and policy decisions about family types, there is likely to be significant room for inaccuracies of these figures based on self-reporting. This is because the categories themselves are understood in a variety of ways. There are generally four categories of the generic group 'lone parents' in official surveys, that of:

- the never married mother (a mother who has never been married before having a child);
- the separated mother (who has separated from their spouse but not legally divorced);
- the divorced mother (who has legally divorced their spouse);
- the widowed mother (whose spouse has died) (ONS 2003).

Social surveys can ask respondents to allocate their marital status to one category. However, the boundaries between these status categories become quite 'blurred' if we trace the complexity of lived experiences associated with routes into, and out of, lone parenthood (Crow and Allan 1999). Hardey and Crow have described the many routes into and out of these categories as:

Routes into lone parenthood:

- *End of cohabitation of a married couple (through separation or divorce) with dependent children;*
- *End of cohabitation of a couple with dependent children;*
- *Death of a parent;*
- *Birth to a single woman with dependent children;*

Routes out of lone parenthood:

- *Reconciliation with a former spouse or cohabitee;*
- *Entry of lone parent into a marriage or cohabitation;*
- *Death of a lone parent;*
- *Children no longer dependent through reaching adult status, leaving home, being taken into care, or due to disappearance or death. (Hardey and Crow 1991: 237).*

We can also add – end of a non-cohabiting partnership to the route into lone parenthood. Many of these events are not clear-cut events but drawn out along time spans relating to an individual's experience and context. Although Allan and Crow identify death of a spouse as possibly a sudden and unexpected event, this could also involve a longer process if a partner's health deteriorates over time (Allan and Crow 1999). Separating from a spouse or long-term partner may involve a long transition, involve change of residency or not, in which it is not always clear if the separation is a temporary or permanent one. Movement between the categories of separated / married can be frequent (Rowlingson and McKay 1998). There is a process of becoming as an individual actively adapts to a perception of self as 'divorced' or 'separated' (Crow and Hardey 1991; French 1991). Alternatively a divorcee may still consider themselves married for sometime (Crow and Hardey 1991; Shaw 1991). Some people may experience parenting alone before separation due to a partner's inability or unwillingness to contribute to parenting or spend a time in transition before they acknowledge the status of divorced or separated (Hardey 1991). In these situations subjective understandings are much more complex than the recognition of an objective event and commencement of lone parent status. These processes of entering/exiting lone parenthood can resist tight official classifications and influence how people report their marital status on official survey forms (Pahl 1984). These examples also relate to the significance of identification processes among varied meanings.

There are also many ambiguities between the legal and social definitions of the categories 'single' mother and 'separated mother'. Single parent or single mum is widely used to describe mothering alone, living alone or being single in everyday language but in official surveys this only refers to those who have 'never-married' (Rowlingson and McKay 1998). The category of 'separated mother/ father/ parent' is also potentially ambiguous as everyday meanings may relate to separation from any form of partnership – cohabiting or not, married or not. Officially this category would only include those who have separated from marriage (Haskey 1998). Rowlingson and McKay extend the category of 'separated lone parent' to include those separated from non-cohabiting, cohabiting and married partnerships (Rowlingson and McKay 1998). They also

extend the category of single never married mother to differentiate between single by choice mothers and single due to childbirth occurring outside of a partnership. Putting these groups of mothers together in their view, greatly exaggerates the trends in single mother headed families as the official category includes single by choice mothers as well as mothers who have separated from partnerships (Rowlingson and McKay 1998). This is particularly significant as Renviose suggests single by choice mothers are a unique and small group of mothers, making up about 8% of never married mothers (Renviose 1985; Duncan and Edwards 1999). Duncan, Edwards, Reynolds and Alldred suggest that it may be a minority of mothers that have explicit values around independent mothering that goes against the grain of conventional heterosexual parenting (Duncan, Edwards, Reynolds and Alldred 2003). Single mothers by choice, that is women who have intended to bear children and mother alone may be part of this minority. Mothers may understand and identify with official categories in many ways.

As well as the scope for a mismatch between legal, policy and everyday definitions surrounding family / parenting status, lone motherhood has also been a highly politicised, moralised issue and social category (Duncan and Edwards 1999; Charles 2002; Silva 1996). As I noted earlier, a notion of marital status and the development of the generic term of 'lone parent' has emerged from ideological and political / bureaucratic debates and practices. In this sense, the category of 'lone mother' can be said to form part of bureaucratic / professional / policy discourses and state practices (Smith 1990; Wallbank 2001). Smith characterises the problematic nature of official categories when they are used as descriptions of lived experiences and actual social relations when she claims these categories serve to instigate and reinforce regulatory measures:

"The deep problem is one which comes about because the categories used in factual accounts do not arise in the setting itself, and do not conform in any way to its social relations, but are pieces of the bureaucratic and professional apparatus, parts of its enterprise, and do its work and mean as they mean in that context." (Smith 1990 : 117).

Smith is claiming that categories devised through processes of policy development can perform certain ideological and regulatory functions (Smith

1990). Notions of family types as alternatives to the traditional married couple nuclear family serves to reinforce boundaries of normal, difference and deviance (Smith 1990). However, within these claims there is also a need to recognise how claims surrounding the legitimacy of lone mother headed families arose from grass roots activities and activism in welfare debates (Williams 1995; Williams 1999). These issues refer to the family as an institution and the processes by which family becomes institutionalised through legal and policy discourses and practices. Smith is demonstrating the limitations of using institutional meanings for examining the family as lived experience and everyday practices.

The use of the concepts of 'discourse' and 'narrative' has expanded some of the arguments Smith (1990) is developing. The notion of discourse is a complex one in social science debates. Conceptual development vary such as those between the more linguistic definitions and meanings systems definitions (Silverman 1997; 2002). The term is used here in the broader sense as 'a set of coherent statements and terminologies' (Foucault 1972). Another aspect of discourse is that in the connections made between statements and the language used, reality is socially constructed in a particular way. Social actions/ actors and practices are implicated from these meanings (Plummer 1995). This relates most closely to a Foucauldian and post-structuralist notion of discourse (Cameron 2001). Foucault used a notion of discourse to displace the marxist preoccupation with structure and ideology. Structural determinism is central to classical marxist ideas about the economic structure and the ideological superstructure. Ideologies are part of the self-conscious superstructure used by a self-conscious ruling class to dominate the working class (Foucault 1972). The coherence of ideologies emerged from the self-interest and self-consciousness involved in purporting an ideological view (Barratt 1992). Foucault argued that power relations occur in a more fluid, deep seated, multi-dimensional way rather than in a top-down self-conscious way (Foucault 1972). Foucault instead applied ideas of the circulation of power processes through formations of meanings that 'assign status and meanings' in differential ways across social groups (Foucault 1972: 107-8). For Foucault, the most powerful discourses have institutional structures such as the knowledges set up through medical or legal disciplines and practices (Foucault 1972). However, power cannot be held in all totality over others. Rather power

flows between individuals as there are always possibilities for resisting subjectification. Discourses can represent the fluid dialogue between lay and institutional versions of morality and reality.

Narrative is also a contested social science concept, informed by a variety of empirical uses and theoretical leanings (Plummer 1995; Reissman 1990; Coffey and Atkinson 1996). A focus on narrative has emerged from the exploration of meanings systems and how 'stories' of reality are developed through the process of making sense of our experiences and through cultural representations of experiences (Plummer 1995). Narrative differs then from discourse, to indicate the storied nature of meaning, identity and biography (Miller 1999; Reissman 1990). Narratives can also be viewed as components of social practices and power relations as different stories are told about different phenomena which has particular social consequences for individuals and groups. There is a stock of meta-narratives that inform our personal story making and biographical narration (Reissman 1990). Moreover, many meta-narratives are retold and consolidated through media representations or institutional knowledges (Mishler 1986; Delamont 1992).

Discourses of family and lone motherhood

Returning to the discussion of meanings of lone motherhood, several discernible discourses and narratives about lone motherhood have been influential in policy debates. The idea of the normal 'standard family' has shaped post-war social scientific, psychological and policy discourses of the family (Cheal 1999). The normal / standard family was influential in theories of modernisation where it was put forward that all modernising societies will converge towards the standard family form (Parsons 1971). This form is of course the traditional married heterosexual couple family with clear normative guidelines and family roles / status positions structuring interaction and activity among family members (Parsons 1971 in Cheal 1999; Gonzales 2002). This normal or conventional family can be said to include:

- ◆ A married heterosexual monogamous couple;
- ◆ Partnership commitment expressed through marriage and cohabitation;

- ◆ The prioritising of marriage / family commitment over other social commitments;
- ◆ Raising of legitimate biologically related children with marriage;
- ◆ Co-residency;
- ◆ A gendered division of labour with a male breadwinner and a female homemaker / carer;
- ◆ Sharing and mutual support financially, emotionally and practically.

It has been argued that this model, in its focus on the gendered division of labour and emphasis on marriage, did appear to have popularity in the 1950's and does appear to reflect some processes of standardisation across many countries (Cheal 1999; Land, Lewis and Kiernan 1997). However, many well documented changes have occurred so that processes of diversification from the standard model are now recognised. These changes are the increases in divorce rates, extra-marital births, cohabitation outside of marriage, ethnic diversity, teenage pregnancies, commuter marriages and childlessness among others (many of which will be detailed below). The idea of a norm at the level of lived experiences is highly contested to the degree that some family sociologists have considered abandoning the concept of family altogether (Bernardes 1986; Gubrium and Holstein 1990; Cheal 1999; Crow 2002).

Functionalism has provided a set of scientific discourses shaping thinking about the family (Ribbens 1984). The nuclear married family can be viewed as functional in relation to a broader economic, social or natural order. In a more recent version of the functionalist argument Zimmerman (1995) set out the key ways that the conventional heterosexual married family fulfils members and societal needs by:

- *Physically caring for the basic subsistence needs of group members;*
- *The addition of new members through procreation or adoption;*
- *The socialisation of children;*
- *The social control of members;*
- *The production, distribution and consumption of goods and services;*
- *The maintenance of motivation and moral of members through nurturance and love. (Cheal 2002:7).*

Many of these functions have been criticised or endorsed as serving social interests. Feminist and / or socialist theories can view the conventional family as

functional in the sense of serving the interests of the ruling classes or patriarchy (Bryson 1999). The privatisation of social reproduction into family units cuts the costs for the reproduction of the workforce and privatises caring as primarily a private family issue and responsibility (Lewis 2001; Daly 2000; Millett 1985; Bryson 1999). In theories of late capitalism, the family becomes a unit of consumption, a target of marketing in the interests of capital (Hawkes 1999). From the more traditional functionalist arguments that value the functions of the family as inherently desirable, many aspects of the conventional family form the bedrock to a stable, functioning society. The roles and authorities bestowed on men and women are viewed as expressing their human natures while institutionally regulated marriage calms impulses towards selfishness and irresponsibility (Morgan 1995). This model of the family assigns men to a provider / authority role while women intensively care for children / family members (Hays 1996). Internal and external pressures towards socialisation and uniform moral rules function to maintain social stability (Morgan 1995). The ties of commitment, co-dependency and sharing are thought to cement the family unit together and offer a setting for our primary, close relationships that we prioritise at all costs (Cheal 1999). This family form is believed to produce well-adjusted and appropriately socialised children so that the family is seen as forming the 'foundations of a decent society' (Fox Harding 1999b). Children are viewed as citizens in the making while parents have the responsibility to socialise children so that they can go on to form stable relationships and conform to social norms (Smart and Neale 1998).

The implications of the functionalist model of the family are that deviations from this standard desired norm can produce anxiety and moral panic. Difference to the norm is equated with deviant motivations. This is where studies that aim to examine family life in context are significant. The 'context' in which family life is lived out can be specified by a focus on risk, identity, values, relationships, resources, culture or support (i.e. Reynolds 2002; Taylor 1998; Duncan, Edwards, Reynolds and Alldred 2003; Finch and Mason 1993). The use of the concept of risk in this study refers to assessments of risky actions and behaviours (Edwards and Glover 2001). However, risk has also become a key concept in ideas of late modernity. Here processes of individualisation involve navigating

the many social and global risks involved in everyday life (Edwards and Glover 2001). The essential feature of studies of family life in context are that they illustrate the varied, as well as structured, nature of the risks, resources and values shaping actions and relationships. Therefore we can see that in practice families members have found it hard to live up to this ideal and are embedded in social / cultural and economic contexts which provide alternative conditions within which to negotiate family life (Ribbens 1984; Parsons 1971; Reynolds 2002; Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan 1999; Vogler and Pahl 1999; Charles 2002; Arber and Ginn 1999).

Essentially the standardisation thesis has now been recognised as premised on one model of the family. Many family sociologists now separate out aspects of the family as a set of values and assumptions and the family as lived experience and relationships (Charles and Beattin 2002). A number of studies have demonstrated that at the level of lived experiences family values and family practices need to be 'worked out' as general principles can entail different meanings and emphasis in practice (Finch and Mason 1993; Neale and Smart 1999). Family values have been investigated across diverse social groups where there is considerable variety but also aspects of convergence (Reynolds 2002; Standing 1998; Baldwin and Carlisle 1999). The imperative for familial care for children as a private responsibility rather than a public responsibility is one issue of convergence (Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards and Gillies 2002). Family resources are extremely varied reflecting class, ethnicity and gender inequalities (Millar and Ridge 2002; Lewis 1997; Crow and Allan 1999; McRae 1999). Family practices vary in these different contexts of family values, negotiations and resources (Morgan 1996; Neale and Smart 1999). These diversities have exposed the mythological and historical location of notions of a standard, conventional family (Smith 1990; Charles 2002).

Returning to the discussion of meanings of lone motherhood, it is now possible to view a notion of the standard, lone mother headed family, as also a 'myth' in some senses. The official definition of lone mother household or alternatives of mothering alone/ single parent suggest shared experiences of parenting and partnering. Instead, a number of social discourses persist that offer a range of

subject positions that mothers' themselves can draw up on, or resist, in their presentation of maternal identities and values. These discourses are configurations of responses to notions of family change / standards. Duncan and Edwards (1999) and later Duncan, Barlow and Grace (2002) have set out four discourses of lone motherhood:

1. Lone motherhood as a social threat;
2. Lone motherhood as a social problem;
3. Lone motherhood as a lifestyle choice and;
4. Lone motherhood as an escape from patriarchy (Duncan and Edwards 1999: 27).

Fox Harding (1993) has also provided a similar conception of wider narratives of lone motherhood as a source of liberation, of social problems or neutrally evaluated. These discourses also offer different emphasis on the risks associated with lone motherhood. The first discourse using Duncan and Edwards (1999) terms is that of lone motherhood as a 'social threat'. Social threat discourses have a long history in UK social policy and are distinguished by the emphasis on the socially harmful consequences of increasing numbers of lone mother headed families. On the level of rhetoric and political ideology, a social threat response to lone mothers has characterised much UK social policy. UK social policy has long privileged the gender order and relational order asserted by the conventional married family model. The conventional family model is seen as more socially desirable as the status quo in terms of gender relations and parent-child relations are maintained. Further, the proper relationship between the state and the family is also maintained through a separation of the private / public spheres in the gendered allocation of family responsibilities (Wasoff and Dey 2002; Millar 1994). Moral panics surrounding divorce and unmarried motherhood have occurred in many historical periods (Land, Lewis and Kiernan 1997; Smart 1999; MacIntosh 1996). A recent moment of moral panic occurred during the 1990's with the conservative governments attempting to re-order family lives in response to a perceived crisis in the family and marriage (Williams 1995). Influential ideas within these governments revolved around the moral superiority of the traditional family form based on the confinement of parenting and partnering to stable permanent, heterosexual marriage with a gender division of

roles (Fox Harding 1999). Developments in the 1960's and 1970's such as increasing sexual permissiveness, divorce and extra marital births, welfare expansion, unemployment, feminism and interventionist equal opportunities legislation were said to have undermined stable marriage, the work ethic and socially responsible behaviour (Fox Harding 1999). Alternative family forms to lifelong marriage were labelled deviant and problematic mainly drawing on the social threat discourses. For example, The Conservative Family Campaign produced a leaflet that said:

"The time honoured family unit, where a father provides and mother cares, is the most fulfilling and effective way of maintaining a stable society....[which was being undermined by] the acceptance of abnormal relationships, in particular the concept of single parenthood as a equal and viable alternative to the two parent family" (in Fox Harding 1999: 120).

Lone motherhood was inherently risky on an individual, familial and societal level. The expansion of the welfare state during the 1960's and 1970's under social and economic conditions of unemployment and unrest as well as the corporatist policies of the Labour governments of the time, were blamed for favouring alternative family forms, taking away the functions of the family and providing incentives to shun one's duties as parents and workers. In the late 1980's and early 1990's, lone parents were particularly under criticism as draining public expenditure and causing social problems through welfare dependency, poverty and the loss of paternal authority and responsibility. Charles Murray notably put forward an argument that the expanding welfare state made it rational to avoid marriage, have children out of wedlock and depend on the state for income and housing (Murray 1995). Morgan (1995) and Dennis and Erdos (1992) also argued the tax and benefit system favoured deviant family forms and encouraged absent fatherhood and individualism over stable, committed married families. Such assessments of family change did influence policy agendas under the Conservatives although the effectiveness and consequences of those policy changes did not necessarily favour the traditional family (Fox Harding 1999). As Lewis noted governments in the UK have little scope to prescribe and implement a strict moral code onto what are widely considered private relations (Lewis 2001). Also, when actual policies are

examined in-depth, departments are seen to exemplify the social processes of agency, resistance, coercion and interpretation that Williams discusses so that policies emerge as a compromise within political struggles for change and have unintended effects (Williams 1995; Smart 1999; Randall 2002).

The second discourse of lone motherhood identified by Duncan and Edwards is the 'social problem discourse'. Here, lone mothers are not viewed as agents holding values and behaving in ways that intentionally threaten the social order, but as victims of circumstance. The social problem discourse illustrates a large body of evidence that lone mothers are disadvantaged because of their vulnerabilities and social inequalities position rather than their deviancy (Duncan and Edwards 1999). Here it is said that structural forces limit the operationalisation of agency and social action materially, practically and culturally (Duncan and Edwards 1999). The social problem approach has been influential in traditional left wing politics and grass roots claims for lone parents' particular needs for public support (Duncan and Edwards 1999; Plummer 1995 NCOPF 2002; Gingerbread 2002). Rather than foregrounding the risks of deviant values and motivations, this discourse foregrounds the risks of material disadvantage or struggles to cope among these families (Harding and Crow 1991). This discourse inspires some of New Labour's current emphasis on structural reform to increase 'opportunities for independence' and tackle social exclusion in the areas of education, low pay, housing insecurity and unemployment (HMSO 1998: Cm 3805).

Lone motherhood may also be celebrated as a source of autonomy and independence – as 'an escape from patriarchy' or 'as a lifestyle choice'. The escape from patriarchy discourse can express feminist values around female independence in relation to men. This discourse could express notions of women's rights to live free from violence and economic dependency on men. Duncan and Edwards (1999) note that this discourse is the other side of the coin to the social threat discourse. Operating as a counter discourse to positionings of lone mothers as deviant, this discourse problematises marriage as a source of inequality for women and children. Alternatively the lifestyle choice discourse has been employed to express values of choice and diversity shaping current

family and partnering arrangements. This discourse is more in line with theories of family diversification and individualisation in modern intimate relations. Lone motherhood is seen as one of the many forms of families or part of the life-course of a family career (Duncan and Edwards 1999; Cheal 1999).

Lone motherhood as a set of discourses then, provides a further answer to the question of what is lone motherhood? The answer here is concerned with broader social representations of lone motherhood as risky or resistance to these representations that present marriage as more risky for women. The focus on the social and political construction of meaning brings to the fore many questions about how lone mothers themselves position their subjectivity in relation to these discourses. It is significant to ask, how and why are particular discourses of lone motherhood invoked? Is it a way of claiming needs / public support / an identity or all of these? Or do women hope to claim a sphere of autonomy from heterosexual co-residency? Which discourses do women align and position themselves with and what does this signify about their subjective experiences of motherhood?

Overall then there are several issues in defining lone motherhood. Not only are there many terms in operation, different concepts relate to different aspects of family life. There are also a range of subjective meanings and subject positions (such as the victim, feminist, deviant or autonomous individual put forward by the four discourses identified above). These meanings are also shaped by discourses that evaluate the moral and social implications of lone motherhood as a risky or acceptable family form. The exercise of categorising families in this way has often been based on political and social values that assume that the white, middle class nuclear family model is universal. This reinforces gendered, classed and ethnically aligned power structures as difference is labelled deviant (Morgan 1995; Hardey and Crow 1991). For all of these reasons typologies of family forms are far from mere descriptions of 'families' and it is important to critically analyse the understandings that lone mothers' hold and their representations of family life. The following section takes a step back from some of these issues to set out the demographic picture of lone mother headed families. However, the following discussion will be qualified with a focus on examining

family life in context rather than asserting uniform processes of social change affect all lone mothers in uniform ways.

2. New Labour policy reforms

I will now turn to recent policy developments and examine the dominant discourses, assumptions, agendas and developments that affect lone mother headed families. There have been several shifts in policy towards lone mothers' as lone parents and towards low income / parenting issues in general. These shifts are justified on the bases of theories of social change and research evidence testifying to patterns of vulnerability and difference found among lone mother headed households. However, the dominant policy discourses of problematisation, difference and deviance remain, while at the same time recent policy developments provide a context for the social and economic opportunities afforded to lone mothers. This analysis draws on the discussion so far and extends the argument that it is the underlying material and cultural context that shapes lone mothers' agency and decision making processes rather factors of family form. Further, what this analysis will conclude is that there needs to be a shift towards the recognition of the complex interconnections between cultural, political and material power relations if we are to understand the complex context in which lone mothers negotiate with public services and the labour market. Policies all too often assume that lone motherhood constitutes a source of difference and disadvantage. If we look closely at the individual trajectories and the local material and cultural context shaping family resources, values and relational commitments – there appears to be a much greater need for universal support needs among families although this support needs to be provided with choices and flexibility over the lifecourse.

New Labour political ideology and policies can be seen to represent an eclectic mix of ideas that sometimes blend contradictory arguments. A more supportive stance towards families is evident in the context of a notable lack of commitment and coherence to UK family policy. New Labour has attempted to enhance the resources for parenting and balancing paid work with care particularly in relation to families considered in 'poverty'. However, there is also a powerful agenda to

make parents more responsible and enhance their accountability in relation to parenting and children's welfare. Framing family life in terms of issues of parental responsibility brings authority and accountability into the picture whilst neglecting other dimensions of family relationships such as ties of affection and democracy. The Supporting Families agenda also involves a 'controlling families' agenda including a conception of parents as in partnership with the State to control children (especially working class children).

In the following sections I will set out the main areas of reform and highlight the key agendas and developments that have taken place since 1997. Following this review, it is necessary to deconstruct the definitions of the problem presented and to interrogate the policy agendas and claims. Two main lines of reform can be said to particularly impact on lone mothers. These are the poverty and social exclusion agenda and the responsible parenting agenda. In fact there are fundamental ways that these two agendas, as they currently stand, have the potential to undermine each other.

The poverty and social exclusion agenda:

The poverty and social exclusion agenda relates to a number of reforms that aim to lift children and lone parents out of poverty and to tackle what the government sees as dimensions of social exclusion and deprivation. Lone parents and their children (again these issues are often presented in gender neutral terms) are particularly vulnerable to persistent and long-term poverty. Comparing lone parent families on the whole to couple families indicates that on several indicators of poverty and disadvantage, lone mothers and their children are disproportionately represented among those in poverty (Marsh and Perry 2003).

On the whole lone mother headed families are extremely vulnerable to low income, housing insecurity, unemployment and poverty although the basis of comparisons are important (Millar and Ridge 2002). Material divisions between lone mother headed households and couple headed households remain pronounced. Lone mother headed households are clustered among the poorest and most disadvantaged social groups if we consider indicators such as income, health, educational levels, employment rates, homelessness and welfare

dependency (Ford, Marsh and Finlayson 1998; Marsh and McKay 1993; Rowlingson and McKay 1998; Ford and Millar 1998; Duncan and Edwards 1997; 1999; Millar and Ridge 2002; Haskey 2002). When we consider employment patterns among lone mother families, the Census found that 48% of lone mothers were employed, 26 % in part-time employment and 21% in full-time employment (Census 2001 ONS 2003). This is significantly lower than the 70% average for female employment rates and 57% average for married mothers. These patterns have occurred at a time when married families have seen an increase in women's labour market participation and their overall family income. Table 3 summarises some of these patterns demonstrated in recent social surveys.

Lone fathers also have lower incomes and employment rates in general than married fathers. According to the figures from the Census 2001, 69% of lone fathers were employed. 7% of these were employed part-time and 62% employed full-time. This is lower than the average male and female employment rates at 80% and 70% in 2002 (Labour Force Survey ONS 2003). It is clear that the presence of children; even among lone father households, reduces employment participation and as a consequence average income levels. Indeed part-time earnings among men are lower than that of women according to the recent New Earnings Survey (ONS 2003). This survey found that 50% of men working part-time earned under £114 a week compared to 50% of women earning under £126 a week (New Earnings Survey 2003). Both of these levels of income are notably low relative to housing costs and childcare costs. However, the slightly lower recorded levels of income for men here could be due to smaller sample sizes among part-time male workers for this survey (ONS 2003).

Table 3: Indicators of poverty and material disadvantage by family type 2001/2

Indicator	Lone mother families	Couple Parent Families
Average Income (with 2 children aged 5 and 11 before housing costs)	£280	£403
% on below 60% average income	46%	22%
Risk of being on low income	67%	33%
% in the bottom income quintile	50%	20%
% in receipt of Income Support or Working Families Tax Credit	75%	14%
% in receipt of Housing Benefit	52%	7%
% with no parent in paid work	69%	20%
% persistently poor (remain on low incomes for three out of four years)	23%	-
% with a car or van	51%	93%
% in social housing	50%	15%

Sources: Family Expenditure Survey, Family Resources Survey and General Household Survey 2000/01 ONS 2003

Consequently household incomes are lower on average in lone parent households than married couples, with 55% of lone fathers and 63% of lone mothers having incomes below £250 a week before housing costs (General Household Survey 2001). Further, lone parents tend to be more reliant on welfare benefits. While 78% of couple families incomes are made up of wages and salaries, this figure reduces to 37% in lone parent households with benefits and tax credits forming 50% (43% welfare benefits / 7% tax credits) of their income (Family Resources Survey DWP 2003).

Poverty in lone mother households is multi-faceted. While providing as a sole adult for children (although we need to be cautious of interpreting households income as family income given the discussion above about family ties extending across households), can limit the income, key factors such as educational qualifications, family size, age, the presence of a long-term illness or disability

and ethnic background contribute to income generating capacities. Single never married mothers, for example, due to their age and lower human capital, are more vulnerable to lower income levels (Carling et al 2002). 66% of single never married mothers have incomes below £200 a week, with 24% below £100 a week and a further 27% between £100-150 a week before housing costs (General Household Survey 2001).

However, this does not make lone motherhood a sole or inevitable cause of disadvantage or that poverty / low income is a problem for lone parent families only. There are statistically more children living in poverty in couple headed households because there are more of these families (Piachaud and Sutherland 2001). However, 33% of poor children live in lone mother households although only 25% of dependent children overall are in these families (Piachaud and Sutherland 2001). Having said this, proportionately, the incidence of child poverty is twice as high in lone parent families than couple parent families (Piachaud and Sutherland 2001). The causes of these trends are diverse as indicators such as unemployment, poverty or ill-health may be as much a contributing factor in routes into lone motherhood as being a consequence. Further poverty rates also vary among lone mothers when we consider the contributory conditions of children's age, maternal education levels, locality, ethnicity and social / cultural capital. Factors such as having a pre-school age child, being a younger mother under 20 years of age, being unemployed, the presence of disability and ill health, living in areas of high relative multiple deprivation, being Pakistani or Bangladeshi or having few qualifications above GCSE level all increase the risks of poverty among women, men and children (Dean and Sutherland 2001; Millar and Ridge 2001; Arber and Ginn 1999; Callender and Kemp 2001). Compared to many other European countries these figures are dramatic. Britain has the highest number of children living in poverty in Europe, twice as many as France and the Netherlands and five times as many as Nordic countries. The proportion of children in lone mother families is also among the highest and their association with poverty is more marked (Piachaud and Sutherland 2001).

Policy reforms have been informed by the social problem and social threat discourse of lone motherhood and have focused reducing welfare dependency, poverty and unemployment. New Labour has developed an array of policies which aim to provide opportunities for lone mothers to take up paid work and training, making work pay, developing a childcare infrastructure and tackling the multi-faceted causes of social exclusion.

Reforming the welfare state around 'the work ethic' has been a major part of New Labour's modernisation programme (Williams 2004; Lister 1999). This means that New Labour has been pursuing a policy of moving people from being in receipt of welfare benefits and unemployed, towards participation in the labour market. The welfare to work agenda was developed at a rapid rate in New Labour's first terms in office and is distinguished from previous welfare policies such as a focus on providing a minimal, albeit secure, income for those groups and individuals vulnerable to unemployment. Rather than providing income security, the welfare system was to be reformed around transitions back into paid work. A right to income security in times of family crisis and separation or illness and unemployment has given way to the elevation of paid work as an expression of active and responsible citizenship (Lister 1999; Lister 2002). There has been much criticism of the strand of left wing thinking that demands unconditional rights as essential features of citizenship (Blair 2003). The calls for civil rights as the basis for freedoms has been harshly reappraised as essentially 'irresponsible and selfish'. Rights and freedoms are to be conditional on your contribution to the collective (Driver and Martell 1997). However, the 'pure' individualism of the New Right laissez faire politics has also been rejected by New Labour as equally selfish and individualistic. The role of the state is viewed as something more than a minimal creation of markets. It is the influential part played by strands of communitarian ideas, especially those put forward by Etzioni and Putman, that have been instrumental in developing the Third Way between socialist state intervention and free market laissez faire politics (Etzioni 1988). Here, a notion of the collective community and trends towards community fragmentation holds centre stage in New Labour rhetoric. Citizenship involves bringing the collective together in a sense of shared values and purpose. Being part of the collective involves rights and responsibilities.

Paid work has come to represent the primary contribution citizens should make to the collective (along with law and order as we will see below). Paid work then is more than a solution to growing rates of poverty, it instills a sense of responsibility and respect to counter a culture of irresponsibility and lack of collective participation. Economic dependence on the state becomes an unacceptable feature of citizenship and hence, no longer a right afforded to those who claim such support needs. This promotion of paid work has involved a series of policies that are aimed at increasing the incentives for parents (as well as all adults) to take up and sustain paid work.

Policies have aimed to increase lone mothers' employment rates through individualised forms of support and infrastructure change. For example, a number of New Deals are offered to several groups and on an area basis, attempting to provide a range of practical and financial support for individuals to increase their employability and chances of moving from welfare benefits to employment. In the New Deal for Lone Parents, a lone parent with school age children and in receipt of Income Support for over 6 months, is invited into their local employment service to attend a work focused interview whereby a personal adviser will assess their chances of moving into paid work (Gray 2001). The personal adviser can offer some financial help with interview costs, childcare costs, finding suitable training or skills development, costing out the financial gain of moving into work or talking through the parents plans for work. Although the New Deal can be presented as a policy of support, there are coercive features as a lone parent has to attend an interview if they are in receipt of welfare for longer than six months. The New Deal for Lone Parents clearly offers an opportunity for the state to survey mothers' activities and paid work intentions and can be experienced as a pressure.

In practice local level implementation can allow for a reinterpretation of national policy so that many of these personal advisers have extended their remit beyond merely matters of getting into paid work or low level training (SPAN 2002; Lewis 1999). Lone parents have managed to claim for financial support to enter higher education or undertake further education courses (SPAN 2002). However, such practices are also regulated heavily with New Labour's reliance

on complex eligibility criteria and performance related targets for policy implementation (Lewis 1999). Support towards training, transport, interview or childcare costs can be heavily prescribed and limited to particular criteria. Financial support for training is only offered for NVQ level 3 qualifications and below and the financial support for attending job interviews or moving into work can be based on taking a job offered to you rather than making your own employment choices (Lewis 1999).

Additionally, lone parents can benefit from a number of other reforms that provide financial and practical assistance taking up and sustaining paid work. To make the transition into paid work more attractive to lone parents, New Labour have not only made welfare benefits less attractive by abolishing the lone parent premiums but they have also provided extra support and one off work grants for those moving into work after longer spells of benefit reliance. A lone parent can receive a getting back to work grant worth up to £300 as well as a month's 'run on' of housing benefit to overcome the difficulties of gaps in earning when one starts paid work (NCOPF 2002). Support for childcare and interview costs is also part of the New Deal package of support although these are contingent on the ND Personal Adviser allocating a job interview that was advertised within the Employment Service (Lewis 1999).

Additional support for working parents to 'make work pay' has also been an area of policy reform (Gray 2001). Working Families Tax Credit was introduced in 1999 as a support for employed parents working over 16 hours a week on low incomes. The tax credit awards a maximum of around £39 a week for parents on incomes of less than £10 000 and working over 16 hours a week. Additionally a childcare disregard of up to 70% of weekly childcare costs is available. The level of support is means tested in relation to income.

New Labour has also set up a National Childcare Strategy (DfES 1997). There are steep policy targets to be met and local childcare partnerships have been developed as a structure to facilitate joint working at the local level between all the stakeholders in childcare services. Partnerships also have targets set specifically in relation to encouraging lone parents to use the childcare places

available (Lewis 2003). Attempts to establish a more family friendly culture and employment practices has also been high up the New Labour agenda. In comparison to previous Conservative governments, New Labour has supported EU directives for increasing parental leave and parental rights for flexible / part-time working hours (Barlow and Duncan 1999). Lone mothers figure in these reforms as parents, lone parents reliant on income support or as parents with low incomes, working part-time and with low qualifications.

In conclusion then, the emphasis in New Labour policies has been to tackle poverty and social exclusion through enhancing mothers participation in the labour market, financially supporting part-time paid work and encouraging mothers to improve their human capital.

The responsabilising families agenda:

The influence of theories of social change have been crucial to New Labour social policy. Society is viewed as moving towards more individualised identities and widening material inequality. Communities are fragmenting. The economy is also restructuring around specialist forms of knowledge as opposed to manual labour. Crime rates and violence are on the increase. The family has become the key institution that can help to restore social morality, equality of opportunity, social order, social cohesion and economic efficiency (Fox Harding 2000; Barlow and Duncan 1999; Lewis 2001). Applying the framework of re-settlements around family, work and nation, Williams has argued that the New Labour project involves a re-settlement in terms of the relationship between labour – capital; state – family and citizen – nation (Williams 1999b). Emerging from many prominent social concerns such as anxiety over recession/unemployment, competing in global markets, protecting national security, tackling child poverty, encouraging parental responsibility and improving mutual and social ties – New Labour offers perspectives on how to define and tackle the problems (Williams, Popay and Oakley 1999; Giddens 1998). In terms of the family, the problems are defined as the need to enable parents and children to increase their human capital so that they can compete on equal terms in the market place and benefit from wealth creation; as well as an interventionist role to tackle social fragmentation, and a deficit in parental knowledge or

responsibility (Blair 2003). Parents need to take on their responsibilities to provide independently for their children, instill moral values and control their child's behaviour to prevent anti-social behaviour.

While the poverty agenda speaks of providing opportunity and tackling disadvantage, the parenting agenda marks out those considered 'good parents' from those considered 'deviant parents'; what constitutes responsible parenting from irresponsible parenting; the conditions in which children thrive and those which present risks to children and by implication society (Social Exclusion Unit 2004). The *Supporting Families* Green Paper explicitly sets out the Government's view that marriage is still the most appropriate family form for raising children. This claim seems firmly based on well established functionalism in that a married heterosexual couple are viewed as being more committed and able in fulfilling their parental responsibilities to care and provide for their children (Supporting Families 1998:30). Marriage is also tied to good quality parenting as it is assumed that married parents sharing a residency leads to pro-active and engaged mothers and fathers (Barlow and Duncan 1999). In comparison to these convictions, the actual proposals that constitute New Labour's approach to strengthening marriage are thin on the ground. The Supporting Families document sets out proposals to offer better preparation for marriage through the use of contractual agreements and advice and a free marriage counselling service to couples experiencing problems or thinking about separation (Supporting Families 1998). Material incentives to encourage marriage as an economically beneficial contract has been limited (Barlow and Duncan 1999).

The ideas propounded by Giddens (1998) of the desirability of couple parenting as more beneficial to children because of the increased resources and attention bestowed on a child, also resonate with the perspectives. Lone parent families are seen as risky for children, as a parent alone struggles to meet their child's needs for attention (Giddens 1998). 'Good parenting' is equated with an idealised version of couple shared parenting. The good parent is also one that puts their children's needs first.

Although alternative family forms and the privacy of partnership choices are in theory accepted in New Labour statements about family diversity, it seems that in practice, New Labour has not extensively tackled the legal and social complexities involved in family diversity (Smart and Neale 1999; Silva and Smart 1999; Barlow and Duncan 1999). This provides evidence that New Labour does not want to extend choice to family formations. Cohabiting parents are to be offered a public non-religious naming ceremony as well as more advice and guidance on their legal position in relation to property, welfare, income, tax and parental responsibilities. But the free counselling service offered to support stability in married partnerships has not been extended to these parents.

In fulfilling one's responsibilities as a parents one is to take up paid work and provide quality care for one's children. Education policy has extended parents' role in supporting their child's learning. If a parent lacks the capacity to fulfil one's responsibilities then professional help is the answer. Here, parents are constructed as in partnership with health and psychology professionals in meeting their child's welfare needs. The problems are represented as a need to support parents with professional advice and information so that they can better fulfil their responsibilities. To help parents with these responsibilities, health visitors have had their role extended and an advice and information service has been set up as the National Family and Parenting Institute was established in 1999. Health visitors, as a universal service offered to all new mothers and fathers, are now to work with mothers and fathers with older children and with relationship difficulties (Barlow and Duncan 1999). The National Family and Parenting Institute was set up to provide expert advice and information to parents and conduct research into good parenting practices. In the Supporting Families paper, the ministerial group state that they seek to create a cultural change so that seeking support is understood as responsible parenting rather than a sign of problems and incompetence (Home Office 1998).

Where parents are unable to control their children and there is a risk of anti-social behaviour then punitive action against a parent will be taken. Responsibilities are also to be enforced through the anti-social behaviour and truancy orders. New Labour tends to see these issues as more an issue of

willingness, morality or lack of parenting skills (Fox Harding 1999; Gillies and Edwards 2003). The overall discourse is one of good responsible parenting involving the regulation of children's behaviour and enhancement of their developmental socialisation into the social order. The issue raised for mothers is one of how to reconcile these priorities and responsibilities with an enhanced participation in the labour market? As well as reconciling one's sense of responsibilities with one's capacity to fulfil such responsibilities.

Within these measures we can see that the discourses of alternative family forms guiding these proposals remain those of the social problem and social threat discourses. The drawbacks and ambiguities within these discourses remain in New Labour's representation of lone motherhood. The tension between choice driven and crisis representations of current family change on the one hand and increasing diversity alongside continuing stability on the other emerge in New Labour policies. The social threat and social problem discourses of family change frame policy agendas (Duncan and Edwards 1999). This translates to an ambiguous set of policies that on the one hand attempts to improve opportunities for educational and employment rewards, taking a pro-active stance to establish a stakeholder and inclusive society supporting citizens in order for all to benefit from the rewards of wealth creation (Blair 2003). However, on the other hand, some 'citizens' are marked out as displaying anti-social behaviour, which is also translated as willingly threatening the social and moral order. With a notion of social cohesion as a greater project, New Labour seems willing to set out on what basis social cohesion will be granted and tackle those viewed as operating against the greater good through coercive means. So, for example, policies such as the parenting orders and anti-social behaviour orders aim to 'remove' unruly young people and council tenants, as well as encourage parental responsibility for young people's behaviour.

Four lines of inquiry will now be considered in relation to these policy shifts towards paid work and responsible parenting. Firstly, mother's themselves may not share this framing of their parental responsibilities and sense of citizenship. Secondly, mother's capacity to fulfil such responsibilities varies. Thirdly, lone mothers' may not see themselves as 'partners' with the state in caring for their

children. And fourthly, there is a need to recognise the complex interplay of cultural, relational, individual, biographical and material factors shaping mothers' agency.

Maternal conceptions of parental responsibilities and citizenship:

There is much evidence to suggest that mothers may not be economically motivated to take up paid work or may at least have other commitments as well. Duncan and Edwards (1999) laid out a comprehensive critique of New Labour's welfare reforms. Duncan and Edwards' study used a mixture of theoretical frameworks and methods. This publication was the latest in a series of research projects with links made with other disciplines and across different countries. In an earlier publication Edwards and Duncan coordinated an international team of researchers to structure their analysis of lone mothers in a set format so that like was being compared with like (Duncan and Edwards 1997). Subsequent work has extended their research into gender moral rationalities and the local variation in family values (Duncan and Smith 2002; Duncan, Edwards, Reynolds and Alldred 2003).

Duncan and Edwards (1999) study examined:

“how lone mothers negotiate the relationship between motherhood and paid work in the different social contexts of neighbourhoods, local labour markets and welfare states – contexts which present different opportunities and constraints.” (Edwards and Duncan 1999:1)

Duncan and Edwards explore:

“lone mothers' understanding and agency using interview information, examining how lone mothers socially negotiate understandings about their lives as mothers bringing up children without a male partner living with them, and about the extent to which mothering is compatible with paid work” (Duncan and Edwards 1999:109).

The central argument of their work is that lone mothers' orientations to paid work are based on moral rationalities. These moral rationalities involve consideration of what is “best and morally right for themselves as mothers and their children” (Duncan and Edwards 1999: 109). Gendered moral rationalities

are moral frameworks based on their responsibilities as mothers and socially negotiated. Duncan and Edwards define gendered moral rationalities as:

“These are collective and social understandings about what is the relationship between motherhood and paid work. Is it right that I, as a mother bringing up a child by myself, should try for a full-time job? What are my responsibilities, how will my behaviour affect my children? What do others expect from me, what do they see as right, and how will they treat me in consequence? Calculations about the perceived costs and benefits will be important once these understandings are established, but are essentially secondary to such social and moral questions.” (Duncan and Edwards 1999:3).

These moral frameworks refer to conceptions of lone mothers’ responsibilities towards their children, a defining feature of lone motherhood in itself (as with motherhood generally) (Duncan and Edwards 1999: 116). The sense of responsibility towards children was a consistent feature that didn’t vary in itself. However there were a number of positions of gendered moral rationalities referring to different ways of discharging those responsibilities. Duncan and Edwards’ central claim is to assert that a form of moral rationality about the proper thing to do as a mother forms the basis of decisions around paid work (which they later developed in relation to decisions for partnering and childcare). Agency, rather than merely based on economic cost benefit analysis as suggested by New Labour social policies such as the New Deal’s assistance in making in-work financial calculations, involves moral considerations and imperatives.

Duncan and Edwards also claim that gendered moral rationalities, although primary to decision making and agency, are conceived in relation to social context and social networks. Gendered moral rationalities do not operate in a uniform way but can shift and are negotiated within everyday relationships. They offer examples from different localities whereby different norms around motherhood and paid work operate. Three positions relating to the relationship between paid work and motherhood emerged from their theoretically informed interview sampling. Firstly, a primary mother gendered rationality. This position prioritises motherhood as stay at home mothering. Duncan and Edwards concluded that working class white women are more likely to hold gendered moral rationalities that emphasis their role as stay at home mothers (Duncan and

Edwards 1999). The prevalence of a primary mother identity among white working class mothers can be due to processes of identity formation whereby the quality of this groups' mothering practices have been heavily under public scrutiny. Such stereotyping and labelling can induce a response of presenting oneself as a dedicated good mother (Jenkins 1996; Taylor 1998).

A second gendered moral rationality is that of the mother / worker integral position. This position views motherhood and paid work as complimentary activities encompassing different dimensions of maternal responsibilities. This position was found to be more common among middle class, feminist or Black Afro-Caribbean mothers. Among these mothers, full-time paid work was more common and the material / educational benefits of working motherhood were stressed. The last gendered moral rationality was a position of the primary worker, which was premised on alternative values to those of maternal responsibilities. The primary worker related to issues of women's identity as paid workers, which could be in conflict to their views of their responsibilities for intensive mothering.

Duncan and Edwards' research contributes another dimension to significance of examining women's agency in social policy debates and the contextual basis of values and actions. If mothers' own agency and identity positions are not taken into account in these policy reforms, there is the risk of a morality and rationality mistake (Carling et al 2002). Social policies may lead to social engineering that involves coercing people into taking actions against their moral positions and treating a diverse social group as a uniform category (Duncan and Edwards 1999:2). Lone mothers make their decision about going into employment based on many financial and non-financial factors. Their decisions are likely to be influenced by values and norms of their local networks and social group (Wallbank 2001).

Several researchers have sought to include lone parent's understandings of the issues that they face. McKendrick's (1998) research using Quality of Life indicators attempts to redefine the 'problems' of poverty and low-income beyond an economic criteria. Beyond a consideration on income maximisation,

McKendrick notes for lone parents paid work may appear risky (McKendrick 1998). Many may prefer to live on a low albeit relatively secure income from welfare rather than an insecure low paid income from employment (McKendrick 1998). A policy focus on raising incomes needs to be supplemented with a strategy of ensuring income security to relate to these concerns. Ford found that 30% of lone parents prefer informal childcare arrangements to using registered services, with a concern for family invested childcare rather than quality professional care (Ford 1996). Graham argued that mothers on low incomes are attempting to survive and cope with the day to day rather than 'move on' and enhance their social, human and material capital (Graham 1984).

Another area of concern around New Labour's views on parenting involve the conception of the 'child'. Children are constructed as dependents and not recognised as social agents in themselves. Parents are constructed as in authority of their children's actions. This construction neglects the complex and interaction basis of parent-child relations. Rather than primarily concerned with controlling children and socialising them into acceptable citizens, parents are concerned with their child's happiness, security and may prioritise building democratic, trustworthy and harmonious relationships. Parents, and indeed many professionals stress the significance of responsive, nurturing and caring relationships with children where boundaries can be negotiated. This requires many skills and resources, not to mention a labour of love. New Labour's approach is more akin to authoritarian parenting, which can lead to conflict and inflexibility within family relationships (Henricson and Grey 2001). Essentially, again everyday experiences and practices may represent a more diverse, complex and shifting notion of parenting whereby a notion of responsibility only presents half the picture.

Capacities as paid workers and responsible / accountable parents:

If lone mothers' were motivated to participate further in the labour market, has New Labour sufficiently tackled the difficulties in balancing paid work with motherhood? Recent research has shown that those mothers who were more job ready, living in higher performing labour markets and with higher levels of human capital are those that have moved into paid work (CPAG 2002; Millar and

Ridge 2003). Piachaud and Sutherland (2001) and Bradshaw (2002) have argued that raising Income Support levels have raised more than 1 million children out of poverty. These researchers argue that those children remaining in poverty, 50% of which are in lone mother families, will not be lifted out of poverty through labour market participation as they live in areas where jobs and childcare are scarce (Piachaud and Sutherland 2001; Bradshaw 2002). Costs associated with transport and moving into work also operate as a barrier for moving off Income Support for many lone mothers. However, Evans et al in their evaluation of the New Deal initiatives also noted that participants valued the individualised programme of support and valued the advice given by personal advisers (Evans et al 2002). These research studies indicate the need to examine lone mothers' perspectives on the local distribution of opportunities and constraints in taking up paid work or balancing paid work with motherhood.

Other studies stress the need for family friendly working practices as employed parents find paid work incompatible with caring. There has also been calls for a carer's allowance to support unpaid caring and the vital role of child-rearing in our society (Gray 2001; Rake 2001). What becomes important here is the role of the local context of labour market and childcare market opportunities as well as the preferences of mothers in relation to formal childcare.

Family life as a private and informal domain:

Another dimension of mother's own conceptions of parental responsibility is the continuity of a notion of family responsibilities as private responsibilities. Policy reforms have shifted away from the traditional UK stance of the privacy of family life towards a much more interventionist agenda whereby the family is the cause and solution of many social problems. However, the shift in wider cultural terms is an uneven and complex one. Research examining patterns of support within families and across social networks have challenged some of the central tenets of New Labour's approach. The trust mothers and fathers are believed to have in professional experts is debatable and subject to change over time (Miller 2001; 2004). Seymour found that collective identity as a lone mother was significant among mothers and led them to prefer reciprocal support between mothers in similar situations to themselves (Seymour in Williams et al 1999).

Lone mothers and working class mothers can particularly resist contact with professionals due to the subjection they experience in the client – professional relationship (Ribbens 1984). Lone mothers are acting to resist processes whereby their maternal practices become problematised. Miller found that women tend to move from positioning the medical profession as the expert on children's needs to viewing themselves as experts through the first year of becoming a mother (Miller 1999). Turning to public support in itself can be understood as failing as a mother or as incompetence (Williams, Popay and Oakley 1999; Edwards and Gillies 2003). Experiences with health / welfare professionals therefore, will shape a mothers' experience of public support. Identities as a mother as well as along class, gender and ethnic dimensions could serve to establish resistances to identifications with professionals as a source of support (Seymour in Williams et al 1999).

The complex moral, cultural and material context shaping maternal agency:

The relationships between agency, local context and structures are crucial in understanding patterns of material disadvantage. If we forefront gender, mothers undertake the majority of childcare and homemaking tasks in the UK. Indeed notions of good mothering, while they vary across cultural and social contexts, can stress the significance of maternal care and availability (Phoenix, Woolett and Lloyd 1991). Empirical research representing mothers' own understandings of motherhood have stressed the significance of notions of maternal responsibilities for children (Ribbens, Edwards and Gillies 2002; Duncan and Edwards 1999; Phoenix et al 1991; Glenn et al 1994). Everyday maternal practices may vary but the imperative to care for children on a day to day basis forms a moral framework for familial practices and decision making processes (Ribbens, Edwards and Gillies 2002). In the context of working class mothering and black women's mothering this emphasis has also included providing for one's children materially through paid work and protecting children from the risks of poverty or racism outside of the family (Reynolds 2002; Glenn et al 1997; Ribbens 1984).

The ideology of good mothering involving maternal care and availability has traditionally been legitimised through psychological discourses of child

development and welfare state settlements (Williams 1999; Ribbens 1984). In the UK, a notion of the private sphere of the family and a woman's primary social role as carer and mother was enshrined in the post-war welfare state (Williams 1999; Wasoff and Dey 2002). Women were to care for their children for the good of the country and their families, while men should provide a family wage or receive a replacement family wage if unable to participate in paid work (Wasoff and Dey 2002; Williams 1999). This welfare settlement involved the active engagement of state officials, government policy and professional child development experts (Williams 1999). The consequences of the male breadwinner/ female carer model of the family institutionalised in the UK through social policy and professional discourse have long been felt as women carry the burden of care with the risk of poverty and unemployment. Not only has the consequences of maternal employment been a major focus of scientific research, UK Governments have consistently taken the position that women should prioritise their caring role for the sake of their children's welfare (Wasoff and Dey 2002; Lewis 2001). We also saw in the earlier discussion that the social threat and social problem discourses of lone motherhood were prominent in Conservative social policy as responsibility for child-rearing and elderly care was reinforced as a familial and private one. Lone mothers then present a social problem as they are viewed as in need of state support to alleviate poverty and support their parenting tasks.

Feminist debates have long considered the significance of gender inequalities based on the unequal relationship between women and men in their social reproduction and production roles. The single male breadwinner model provides men with economic power in the family (Pahl and Vogler 1999). Womens' dependency and poverty in comparison to men's authority and dominance is legitimised in this arrangement. Options for women to take up paid employment, for the state to provide childcare and for men to be more involved in mothering have hence been long on feminists' agendas. However, feminists have also been long divided on the issue of whether women need to be liberated from motherhood or whether the societal conditions need to shift to value women's special role and unpaid welfare work (Bryson 1999; Land 2002).

While some feminists view the problem as one of women internalising these dominant ideologies of their caring role, recent sociological research has emphasised women's own agency and interpretations of the significance of caring in their lives. Rather than view caring as something forced onto women, some of these studies consider the contextual and emotional significance of caring in women's lives (Smart and Silva 1999). A turn in these debates was prompted mainly by the work of Finch and Mason (1993) and Finch (1989), where by they examined women's lived experiences and interpretations of good mothering and family obligations. Finch and Mason (1993) focused more on moral reasoning and broader notion of kin obligations rather than good mothering. They argued that the context of lived relationships is crucial to understanding how people actually did provide help and support to kin. Considerations such as the history of giving and receiving support, the health of the family member, the deserving nature of help and the quality of the relationship were important to considerations about providing kin support (Finch and Mason 1993). Finch and Mason (1997) and others (Duncan and Edwards 1997; 1999; Graham 1999; Glenn et al 1997; Ribbens 1984) indicate the significance of family relationships and commitments in people's lives but stress the local contextual nature of how family relationships are actually worked out and carried out. Notions of legitimate needs and legitimate responsibilities are widespread. However, dependency and legitimacy in relation to support and care is often negotiated in context rather than prescribed uniformly. Lawler argued that motherhood is constructed around a notion of children's needs which mothers place before their own needs (Lawler 2001). These studies further demonstrate the ways that mothers' themselves may see paid employment as risky to their children's needs. I will return to these questions later on in this review.

The effects of the powerful moral discourses of good mothering as intensive stay at home mothering (whether reinforced by state policies, professional discourses or mothers' own discourses) can be seen in the disparities of income and employment participation among mothers and others. Although the gap between men and women's contribution to households tasks and caring for children, sick or elderly family members has decreased, women still report undertaking the

bulk of this care and domestic work. In 1999, the Omnibus Survey found that 74% of women compared with 30% of men performed cooking, cleaning and washing up tasks on a daily basis (Omnibus Survey 1999 ONS 2003). 58% of women while 30% of men undertook the care of children on a daily basis (Omnibus Survey 1999).

Some of these facilitators of social change such as changing welfare regimes, labour market restructuring and changes in family forms have been brought together as representing processes of individualisation. In answer to questions such as why are less people marrying? Why are partnerships dissolving? Why are more people living alone? Why are there more lone mothers?, a diverse body of thought locates change within processes of detraditionalisation, democratisation and overall individualisation as dynamically changing social and intimate relations. The theories that centre processes of individualisation tend to view social change as involving large structural shifts towards late modernity, late capitalism or postmodernism. The emphasis on capacities for agency or the overpowering nature of social structures in leading to processes of individualisation are debated.

Giddens offers an analysis that has tended to emphasise the increasing opportunities within late modernity in western societies to exercise choice and negotiation in intimate and social relations (Giddens 1991; 1992). Giddens draws on the analytical lens offered by structuration theory (Giddens 1979). Giddens' structuration theory emphasises the relationship between creative human agency as the everyday social practice whereby individuals can act to conform social conventions or can act to resist and transform them (Giddens 1979). What becomes crucial in the processes of structuring social life are the resources available to individuals in their negotiation of social action (Giddens 1979). Giddens' notion of 'resources' has been variously expanded to include resources such as social networks, education, economic independence, cultural capital in social theories examining the relationship between social structures, social practices and the operationalisation of agency (Swingewood 2000). These possibilities and resources for reflexivity, agency, resistance or restructuring through our everyday social practices are for Giddens a key feature of the

dynamic complexity in social relations. His meta-social theories such as the move from modernity to post-modernity and globalisation, involve a notion of human agency as a possibility for change or transformation as well as an understanding of the multiple institutional and economical power structures forming a complex social context for individual action (Hall, Held and McGrew 1992). For Giddens, there has been a widening of opportunities and resources across social groups so that individual agency has become crucial in negotiating one's life course (Giddens 1979).

Giddens' has applied some of these ideas, especially the shift to late modernity, within his theory of the detraditionalisation and democratisation of adult intimate relations (Giddens 1992). In light of massive global, cultural change and increasing lifestyle choices, taken for granted meanings and traditional life-paths are challenged (Giddens 1992). Diversity occurs alongside increased uncertainty as the emphasis shifts from expected prescribed lifepaths and obligations to the need to choose one's own life careers. One of the key features of change for Giddens has been the democratisation of relations so that claims to legitimate authority have been examined for hidden inequalities (Giddens 1992). Rather than duty to conform or fulfil one's role as wife or husband, marriage and partnerships more broadly, are now based on 'pure love' and 'confluent love'. The 'pure relationship' is a relationship based on choosing to be with someone out of romantic feelings and mutual attraction (Giddens 1992). Domination and inequality is the anti-thesis to such a relationship. Gender equality, mutual respect and open communication is seen as integral to these relationships (Giddens 1991; 1992). Confluent love is contingent. For example, confluent love is contingent on romantic feelings remaining as such, and once they have dwindled, this serves as justification for the relationship to end. Confluent love is inherently unstable. Developing one's 'project of the self' and 'search for ontological security' are key features of our late modern selves as life paths in employment careers, education or partnerships require active construction and choice making in the face of many alternatives rather than 'laid down' prescriptions of what to do (Giddens 1991:2). These forms of intimacy, for Giddens, represent a new form of intimacy in late modern times. The pure relationship is not shaped by legal norms but individualistic and democratic

tendencies (Giddens 1992; Smart and Neale 1999). Using these theoretical frameworks, Giddens' views divorce as an expression of instability in intimate relations caused by the contradictory forces of higher expectations of relationships and the emphasis on individual wants / needs / rights and desires (Giddens 1992).

Essentially, when consider increasing rates of marital separation, Giddens does indicate the role played by changes in meanings around intimacy and real advances in challenging the gender inequalities within the male breadwinner nuclear family model. Further, Giddens places family change in the context of broader social changes having global ramifications (Smart and Neale 1999). However, Giddens' ideas may fit better with explanations of partnership dissolution and formation rather than parenting changes. For example, in the context of no children, adults have increasing choices for partnerships. However, as Smart and Neale have indicated parenting seems far from contingent and negotiable (Smart and Neale 1999). Rather caring relationships endure out of commitment and moral responsibility (Smart and Neale 1999). If we consider changes in lone motherhood, his neglect of class and social pressures in understanding motivations for marriage, child-rearing as well as divorce are exposed. Further, the lack of attention paid to the presence and value placed on children as an anti-thesis to individualistic decision making and leading to enduring relational commitments overtime is another key issue (Edwards and Ribbens 2002; Allan 1985; Crow 2002; Smart and Neale 1999). The social distribution of risk and resources are also underplayed according to some critics. Smart and Neale argue that the conditions within many families simply do not support the establishment of 'pure' or 'democratic' relationships within or beyond the family (Smart and Neale 1999). The reasons for becoming a lone mother are often reported to involve domestic violence, hidden poverty in marriage, difficulties with meeting a partner who could 'provide for the family' and economic insecurity (Maclean 2001; Hague and Malos 1993).

Giddens also fails to fully recognise the degree of contested meanings surrounding equal and democratic relationships. In social attitude surveys, men tend to over-report the equality in their relationships in terms of shared domestic

chores or caring labour while women continue to feel overburdened (BSA 2001). However, the idea that if one communicates openly or shares decisions then a relationship is equal pervades society (Crow 2002). This raises the concern that many are accepting inequality within relationships alongside the impression of equality (because individuals have legal rights of exit from marriage / protection from violence) (Crow 2002). What may be at issue for Giddens' theory is that if we consider the material and discursive contexts structuring experiences of lone motherhood, then this is a case of limited resources or alternative values in relation to an individualistic lifestyle. The unevenness of processes of individualisation becomes an issue. Many researchers have argued that it is women and men with less caring commitments and more financial independence that are more able to negotiate their lifepaths and relationships (Pahl 1992; Crow 2002). Agency in exiting and forming partnerships may have become more significant but in the context of caring responsibilities the relationship between social structures and agency alter.

Alternative theories that have identified processes of individualisation point more to structural processes driven by market expansion and state responses to such expansions. For example, Beck (1992) and Beck and Beck Gernstein (1995) also view late modernity as characterised by globalisation and individualisation processes. However, they represent the individual subject as the locus of self-management whereby the stark contradictions of the social order converge and need working out. The individual becomes the self-carer negotiating their own pathway through the many social risks in modern life. The relationship between paid work and care is one major tension that runs through modern welfare systems. As welfare is resettled around participation in the labour market, tough decisions need to be made about how to balance paid work with care (Beck and Beck Gernstein 1995:13). The traditions of how paid work and care (in this case child-care) in a country / locality, and the gender order of how men and women are expected, and actually involved, in that care become crucial forces involving the pull of tradition and the push of modernisation. Women and men are drawn into aspirations for careers, leisure, romantic relationships and consumption (Beck and Beck Gernstein 1995). Beck develops ideas of a risk society culminating from these structural forces and individualisation processes. In the

risk society, individuals are encouraged by state policies, policy discourses and wider social narratives, to take responsibility to manage and develop strategies to tackle the risks coming from all directions – within the family from abuse/ divorce to danger from strangers, from environmental disaster, terrorism, unemployment, loneliness or poor health (Beck 1992). The extents of social risks are brought to our homes on a daily basis through crisis led and sensationalistic media narratives (Denzin 1999).

Both Giddens and Beck and Beck Gerstein have focused on grand theories of social change and emphasise changes in partnership practices rather than caring practices. These sociological theories have, however, connected decision making and practices within the family to the broader social context which is a step forward towards situating lived experiences in social processes compared with reactionary responses to family change (Smart and Neale 1999). Both of these models of social change emphasise the connections between ways of thinking and acting with wider power structures and cultural / material processes. Both find the sphere of intimacy and family lives radically altered and transformed by the wider social and economic changes in people's lives.

Other recent sociological and welfare theorising attempts to reformulate some of these arguments specifically in relation to welfare and care. One model developed by Williams, Popay and Oakley (1999) stresses the multidimensional facets of individual agency in relation to several levels of contextual influences. This model outlined the significance of individual and local level factors, national policy factors and international processes in shaping the social locations of welfare subjects. For example, at the level of the individual, they contest a notion of the uniform welfare subject, who understands their sense of self in a uniform way. For Williams, Popay and Oakley (1999), identity and subjectivity are crucial factors in explaining how an individual acts in a given situation. Many qualitative and triangulated studies have examined lone mothers experiences and perceptions of family change (Rowlingson and McKay 1996; French 1991); family responsibilities (Duncan and Edwards 1999); adaptive and coping strategies (Crow and Hardey 1991; French 1991; Shaw 1991; Kempson

1996) and how they negotiate opportunities and risks (Crow and Hardey 1991; Rowlingson and McKay 1996).

These studies have attempted to explain the key processes at work in shaping maternal decisions and circumstances. For example, Rowlingson and McKay argue that lone motherhood is the most appropriate option for many mothers' given their circumstances and the wider cultural and economic context that is more accepting and supportive of lone motherhood than in previous times (Rowlingson and McKay 1996). The process of becoming a lone mother is embedded in a wider set of experiences, relationships and resources. Rowlingson and McKay found that mothering alone can be the outcome of a time of family crisis contributing to a process of problem solving (Rowlingson and McKay 1998). Crow and Hardey (1991) and Kempson (1996) argue that the material options for housing and income are extremely constraining for lone mothers, many of whom have long trajectories of high risks to poverty before, during and after spells of lone motherhood. However, these authors demonstrate the many ways that lone mothers develop strategies to not only shield their children from many of the effects of poverty but also to make ends meet in resourceful ways (Kempson 1994). Edwards and Duncan also give theoretical weight to processes of creative human agency as well as wider economic and cultural processes in their theory of gendered moral rationalities which places family values and moral rationalities at the heart of maternal decision making processes (Edwards and Duncan 1999; Williams, Popay and Oakley 1999).

These areas form the focus of the research that follows. The study aims to examine the divergence and convergence between maternal and policy concerns. The role played by the local cultural, material and individual context in shaping maternal concern is examined. In many areas of New Labour social policy there are prescriptions on how to be a good parent, and a good lone mother. Social policies also continue to represent lone motherhood as risky in terms of poverty, parenting, lack of support or deviance. However, in depth studies of parenting and maternal practices have demonstrated the variety and context dependent nature of mothers' agency, identity and values. This research aims to contribute to these debates about the relationship between lived experiences, subjective

situated understandings and current social policy directions. This contribution is based on the following case study of lone mothers' understandings of the risks and benefits associated with becoming a lone mother and sustaining their role as carers and providers. This research asks how mothers' themselves manage and perceive their role as carers and paid workers? What resources in their local social worlds and networks are constraining and facilitating? What do they perceive as the risks and opportunities associated with lone motherhood?

Before the findings of the study are set out, the next chapter describes the methodological perspective and design of the study.

Chapter Two

Methodology

Introduction

The overall methodological approach taken in a study, the underlying assumptions / assertions in relation to epistemology and ontology as well as the particular methods of data collection and analysis, shape the type and scope of the knowledge produced. In the literature review, a recurrent theme revolved around the prevalence of quantitative, positivist and empiricist approaches to understanding lone mothers' social actions as well as the limitations of qualitative studies that 'give voice' but dislocate the individual from wider discourses or context. There have been fewer studies that have examined the social processes shaping individuals' 'choices' and actions (Williams, Popay and Oakley 1999; Duncan and Edwards 1999; Duncan and Smith 1995; Finch and Mason 1993). This leads to a 'poverty of theory' in explaining how mothers themselves negotiate and perceive their social worlds (Taylor 1999). Large-scale social surveys statistically analyse the relationship between variables and can indicate general patterns and relationships. However, they are more limited in providing a picture of the social processes involved in producing relationships and correlations between variables (Morgan 1996; Duncan 2004). This has led to many descriptive studies of family change among social policy research (Carling, Duncan and Edwards 2002).

A further central criticism of the use of positivistic assumptions and quantitative research designs has been the extent to which the problems, aspirations and needs shaping lone mothers' intentions and actions were decided at the outset of the research rather than emerging from the inquiry itself (Morgan 1996; Carling, Duncan and Edwards 2002). Feminist and critical criticisms of positivist research paradigms have asserted that a process of constructing social problems based on implicit values rather than an objective stance forms the basis of research (Stanley and Wise 1983; 1993; Silverman 2002; Fraser 1995; Land, Lewis and Kiernan 1997). Notions of independence / dependence, needs / wellbeing, poor / better off and vulnerability / risk that inform welfare policy concerns have been demonstrated as based on assumptions of the 'normal' lifecourse whose frames

of reference are white, male, middle class experiences and aspirations (Rubington and Weinberg 2003; Song and Edwards 1997; Gubrium and Holstein 1987; 1990; 1997; Phoenix 2000). Claims of objective social inquiries have increasingly been challenged and examined in relation to the assumptions of lifecourse, difference and marginality that they unintentionally carry forward (Phoenix 2000; Carabine 2000; Jessop 2000).

This issue is particularly pertinent to research around lone motherhood as research questions and policy debates have emerged from a particular historical, cultural and political set of conditions (Williams 1995; Lewis 2001). A focus on lone motherhood can begin from a position of viewing these families as inherently problematic in terms of dependency on the state or needs for support, while leaving unexplored the problematic tensions experienced by family members themselves even in more 'traditional' family arrangements. The extent to which some social policy research has been driven by political, ideological or normative assumptions while claiming to be doing objective social science has often been noted (Cheal 2003; Lewis, Gewitz and Clarke 2000). Cheal makes the point that research on family formations and family types has long dominated officially funded research due to the implications of changing family forms for taxation, public services and family law (Cheal 2003). The sub-script here is a concern with difference and change because these dimensions of social life challenge the status quo rather than a concern with welfare across all families. Millar and Ridge have also argued that there is more known about the population and circumstances of low income lone parent households in comparison to many other family circumstances such as low income couple households or older parents (Millar and Ridge 2002). Seymour notes that studies of welfare needs have often focused on working class families and lone mothers while couple families are viewed as beyond such vulnerabilities (Seymour 1999). Others have noted that 'objective scientific research' has often been driven by professional discourses that problematise these families on the basis of assumptions about 'normal' families and emotive / stereotypical responses to difference (Land, Kiernan and Lewis 1997; Phoenix 1996; Fox Harding 1999; Millar 2003; Ribbens 1994; Wallbank 2001). Meanings, assumptions and the socially embedded nature of researcher's understandings / social science knowledge

becomes a crucial aspect of inquiry which remains closed off if we position our research inquiry as based on objective value free sociology (Stanley and Wise 1983; 1993; Ribbens and Edwards 1998; Roberts 1981; Harding 1987; Fonow and Cook 1991; Swingewood 2000). The implication of this is that claims of objectivity can reinforce discriminating categorisations or theories, or misrepresent the dynamics / existence of diverse social experiences and aspirations. As Foucault argued, objective scientific research has gone far in normalising a particular set of values based on a particular groups social experiences and aspirations and normalised these as being held by the general populace, or by implication should be held (Foucault 1979; Wallbank 2001). However, extensive social survey research designs are in line with the purpose of policy research to establish broad patterns, generalisable findings and numerical indicators of prevalence and cost (Duncan and Edwards 1999). Social policy has traditionally developed according to welfare claims and policy decisions based on cost / benefit analysis (Ford 1996).

Qualitative research is not altogether in opposition to quantitative, or rational choice research, but in this study I have taken a methodological stance that aims to enhance issues of validity through recognition of the role of the researcher, values, cultural assumptions and social location in the research process. The study begins from an alternative set of research questions and perspectives about social policy. Starting from the position of the role of interpretation, values and cultural location in knowledge production, the aim, in various ways, is to investigate meanings – their range, their construction and their consequence (Mason 1996; 2002). Representing and evaluating policy objectives in relation to lone mothers' own understandings is viewed as a central feature of critical policy analysis. However, there are many complicated issues of validity in taking such an approach as representations can only be partial, are mediated through the researcher and the produced through the research process.

This study has been informed by the eclectic and wide-ranging notion of 'feminist research' (Ribbens and Edwards 1998; Harding 1997; Stanley and Wise 1993; Abbott and Wallace 1997). Feminist research does not necessarily dictate methods but there are some elements of common themes and principles in

conducting social research (Harding 1997; Letherby 2003). Firstly, the relationship between doing feminist research and the production of knowledge involves some sense of tackling social inequalities in their varied and complex nature. Ribbens and Edwards acknowledge this in their concern to explore women's private understandings of issues that often have large influential bodies of public knowledge (Ribbens and Edwards 1998). For Ribbens and Edwards, this relationship between private meanings and public knowledges is played out in the research process itself as a researcher embodies the personal, private and public (Ribbens and Edwards 1998). Gaining access to and examining the interconnections between private and public knowledges is for Ribbens and Edwards an inherently political process:

"We need to produce for ourselves our own social and collective forms of self-representation, in order to transform and modify dominant patriarchal forms of representation, and to make visible a different social and cultural order within which to define our identity and subjectivity. In a sense we are seeking to transform private knowledge into a more publicly based resistance, or least diversification and undermining of hegemony. The challenge is to remain sensitive to the diversity given the power of hegemony." (Ribbens and Edwards 1998:13)

This task is relevant to studies of motherhood, given the powerful public discourses of psychological child development, functionalist family paradigms and intensive mothering in the UK. Yet Ribbens and Edwards (1998) notice that women make sense of their mothering careers, act in ways that make sense to them, devise their own coping strategies (which could be harmful to their wellbeing or not) and negotiate a range of family practices in relation to the resources they assess as available (Ribbens 1984; Ribbens and Edwards 1998). But the morally and socially constructed nature of these activities are heavily prescribed and regulated through social networks, discourses, normative guidelines and structures (Ribbens McCarthy, Gillies and Edwards 2000). Feminist research has a commitment to 'politically motivated research and politically engaged theory' (Kemp and Squires 1997:6) and 'begins from the premise that the nature of reality in western society is unequal and hierarchical' (Skeggs 1994:77).

Post-structuralist theories of knowledge production and their relationship to power have been influential in feminist research theory and practice (Stanley 1997; Skeggs 1994). Here also the production of knowledge is seen to involve power relations and is argued to be an ideological affair, as the researcher cannot separate themselves from the world, their values, assumptions and opinions (Letherby 2003). Ribbens and Edwards call this the link between our public, private and personal formations of self that all play a role in knowledge production (Ribbens and Edwards 1998:13-16). Our public selves are steeped in research knowledge and analytical processes. Our private selves involve the interconnections between our own social settings, relationships and experiences, to our research and analytical insights. The 'personal' then provides a further layer of inner voice and reflexivity that involves emotion, intimacy or the body (Ribbens and Edwards 1998: 14). These boundaries only make sense in relation to each other – the personal is regulated and may not become the public because of our perceptions of the public. All of these aspects embody the role of the researcher in the research process and knowledge production. Autobiographical approaches seek to explicitly link the analytical with an exploration of the 'multi-dimensional self' in the research, so that the researcher's reactions, emotions and life experiences become part of the analysis of the data (Letherby 2003). While this study has not used this approach wholeheartedly, the concern to mark out the links between the personal, private and public are at the forefront of analysis.

This is even more pressing given the difficulties of taking a position in relation to power structures and inequalities. If the aim is to represent women's experiences, private knowledges and marginality, how does a researcher stand outside of such power structures guided as much by cultural assumptions as institutional practices? The logical conclusion of the socially constructed nature of reality and embedded nature of power relations leads to a 'crisis of representation' (Giddens 1979; Denzin and Lincoln 2002). On what basis can feminist qualitative research claim to be producing research findings rather than opinion reflecting social location? This issue is a complex one to resolve. However, mapping out our research practices, social situations and enhancing reflexive thinking has been argued as key to strengthening the validity of findings (Ribbens and Edwards 1998; Miller 1999).

Given these methodological influences, this study develops a qualitative research design to examine lone mothers' own constructions of self, social positioning and the social worlds they inhabit in relation to how policy constructs their social positions and identities (Ezzy 2002; Phoenix 2000). The aim is to produce a 'representation of the other' through an in-depth gathering of lived experiences and accounts of social worlds. However, these accounts are viewed as partial and situated (Harding 1997). They are partial, due to the 'double hermeneutic', of being my interpretations and analysis of their experiences. They are situated, in the sense of arising out of a research setting and relationship in particular localities and socio-historical circumstances (one of each of our relationships to our private, personal and public selves in the research process as well as our relationship with each other). The aim is to produce more grounded theory in the sense of developing grounded concepts rather than necessarily privileging a meta-narrative position of capitalism, patriarchy or rationalities. A careful line is followed between theoretical sensitivity and grounded experiences so that the social positioning of subjects is a matter of inquiry rather than already dictated. This approach relates to the situated, hermeneutic context-dependent approach to empirical inquiry that has emerged from more post-structuralist micro-social analysis and has been influential in analysis of family life experiences (Ezzy 2002; Ribbens and Edwards 1998; Morgan 1996; Finch and Mason 1993; Williams, Popay and Oakley 1999). This methodological position was consolidated within the first year of the research, as these early stages involved many interconnections between the personal, private and public 'selves' of this researcher.

Towards a research focus and question:

From the outset, this study was concerned with generating accounts of lone mothers' own understandings, world views and experiences in the light of an absence of their voices, claims and concerns in recent policy debates and the pervasive nature of dominant social discourses around good / bad mothering and lone motherhood. This concern led to the consideration of a qualitative research design that aimed to explore the connections between making sense of one's actions and experiences; how interpretations / meanings relate to social actions

and how policy representations may be contested or reinforced through claims for welfare support / independence (Denzin and Lincoln 1998; Williams 2000). I hoped to conduct semi-structured interviews with around 50 mothers to explore a number of deductively derived substantive topics with a broad range of mothers rather than conduct focus group interviews or life history interviews (Mason 1996). I aimed to use individual interviews as a means of capturing women's perspectives, experiences and dilemmas around lone motherhood and negotiating current welfare policy.

These research decisions were partly due to the theoretical concerns to build more grounded concepts set out above. However, there are also political and personal issues that contributed to the substantive research interests. Many researchers, especially feminist researchers, have highlighted the personal nature of their research interests. This was clearly set out by Oakley (1981) in her study of housewives; as she was curious to examine the currency of her own experiences of juggling career aspirations with intensive mothering (Oakley 1981). Many other researchers have also set them out in a more systematic way as with Letherby's use of autobiography. Letherby analysed her experiences, roles and perceptions of 'involuntary childlessness' as well as the impact of her own social location on the research 'process and product' (Letherby 2003).

Miller (1998) argued that our biographies shape our research interests in fundamental ways. My own social location is relevant to the study. I am a white woman in my 30's, although I feel little sense of nationalistic belonging possibly as I was born and spent my early years in France. My mother attempted to keep up our French speaking once we moved to the UK and I have spent most of my childhood and adult life moving between European countries and different parts of the UK. I could describe myself as middle class as my parents' employment status is managerial / professional. I received a grammar school education in the first three years of my secondary schooling and have undertaken a degree in higher education. However, reflecting on my own experiences there are ways that classifications of class or ethnicity are problematic. I was aware during my childhood of sporadic security in a financial and housing sense. At times my parents struggled to maintain their careers, as well as necessities such as housing

/ food / school clothing. Our family experienced occasions of being 'better off' with periods of bankruptcy / housing insecurity / lack of school clothing. However, we were also aware that the period of 'poverty' was temporary, involving the ups and downs of our parents 'self-employed' status in a changeable market for business. After leaving school with A levels, I worked as a care assistant, bar person, factory worker, shop assistant and postal worker before deciding to go to university in my early 20's. I worked part-time to fund my higher education degree as well as receiving support from my parents. At university I had become involved in student politics and campaigning. After graduating with a social policy degree, I settled in the city where I had attended university and was employed as a research assistant at the university.

A few years later, I was involved in a relationship that broke up soon after I became pregnant. So at the time of contemplating a postgraduate degree, I was a mother myself, in my late 20's, and my daughter was pre-school age. I had spent the last three years receiving welfare benefits as I concentrated on raising my daughter. Again I was aware that this was a temporary source of income and I planned to take up further research / higher education studies or employment at some point in the near future. Although, my daughter regularly visited her biological father and we had an amicable / supportive friendship, I did identify as a lone mother as I undertook the bulk of the caring work and would make all the day to day and long-term decisions affecting my daughter. I felt it was important for my child to know her father, and have a relationship with him, but I saw my maternal role as one of sole responsibility. On reflection many aspects of the specificity and general nature of my experiences reinforced this division of responsibility. The relationship with my daughter's father had been short-lived, he tended sporadically to be involved and I did prefer the autonomy of 'getting on with it' and delight in having the one to one relationship with my daughter. My own social networks felt supportive and positive at this time, as many of my friends had children of a similar age and we gained much satisfaction in sharing our experiences and activities.

There are two issues of relevance about these 'personal and private' aspects of my social location and biography. Firstly, my own experiences and priorities,

personally and politically, led to my interest in this research area and secondly, during the process of doing this research I have attempted to critically reflect on the particularity of my own experiences and the relationship between these and how I heard / read the mothers' accounts. I soon realised that my own routes into lone motherhood had not been extensively marked by traumatic parental separation or conflict. Lone motherhood for me was viewed as a positive choice, whereby I was making a decision to raise my daughter alone albeit with much support. This was not unusual or problematic in my experience of my networks, which could have much to do with my age (as noted in the literature review) and feminist inspired values. However, during the recruitment of my interview sample, it transpired that 13 out of the 43 women interviewed had experienced domestic violence in some form. One additional woman had left her husband after her daughter disclosed her experiences of child abuse. I was disturbed by the extent of violence and abuse among such a small random sample of women and the extent to which these mothers had maintained partnerships even in the context of being highly unsatisfied and often unsafe. I found this number to be alarming considering the sample for this study was selected from a range of sources involving the researcher's social networks, snowballing, community family support and local lone parent groups. However, previous research about domestic violence suggests such experiences are common across women and men and across class groupings, ethnic groups and sexualities (Hague and Malos 1993; Stanko 1995; Kelly 1998). I have endeavoured to understand these issues and the research has led me to rethink my own social location / values / ideas (Plummer 1983; Steier 1991; Stanley and Wise 1993).

My personal interest in understanding what it means to be a mother and how women negotiate motherhood with their other life priorities, interests and sources of identity launched the research. At the outset of my research I was interested in investigating what seemed an oversimplification and misrepresentation of people's lives and concerns in national media and social policy debates at the turn of New Labour's welfare to work strategy. My concern was similar to those that prompted Oakley and Letherby, to examine how far the tensions and contradictions I was aware of had wider currency, and to explain the nature and consequences of these understandings in women's lives.

The key features of the initial research design were to follow a group of lone mothers as they attempted to access public support for taking up paid work. Key features of the research design were:

- To recruit a sample of mothers participating in the local New Deal for Lone Parents scheme;
- To conduct semi-structured interviews at two occasions as they participate in the scheme and attempt to take up paid work;
- To interview 50 lone mothers about their notions of maternal responsibilities, intentions and capacities to take up paid work;
- To examine the local context of the New Deal Programme.

These questions were aimed at exploring the relevancy and appropriateness of the local contours of the national programme of New Deal for Lone Parents. I hoped to compare mothers' representation of the problems and the local institutional practices / discourses to the dominant national policy perspectives. However, in the process of conducting a pilot study that involved an initial attempt to recruit lone mothers for the study, interviewing members of my own networks and discussing these questions with welfare / employment service professionals, I became more interested in issues of subjective experience rather than policy effectiveness / implementation. This shift in interest demanded a rethink of research design and issues. So far the research embodied a policy-focused approach to exploring subjective experiences. This steered the research in particular directions and tended to inhibit the way women were actually able to 'voice' their experiences. Analysis of preliminary interviews brought tensions in the research question, approach and design to the fore. I noted in my research diary:

"The research is framed in highly political terms with questions directly relating to policy and institutional concerns rather than creating an open dialogue for personal accounts. I feel positioned as a New Deal Personal Adviser when I ask about their plans and thoughts about working."

While such a research design would have gathered substantive findings on lone mothers' engagement with policy discourses and objectives, I was much more interested in establishing the diversity of, and situated nature of, their family priorities, notions of self and social positioning. Personal experience did come into this equation as I was aware of extremely complex emotions and issues surrounding meanings and experiences of mothering alone and paid work. I was also aware of the complexity of making sense and providing an account of such issues. It was also possible that I was experiencing a different set of issues to others, as a critical researcher background has tended to heighten my analysis of my own experiences! However, the research design as it stood did not capture these complexities but rather tended to centre dominant policy discourses that lone motherhood was an issue of poverty and unemployment. I will now provide some more in-depth examples of these problems in these early stages. These were the difficulties of recruiting a sample through the employment service, a semi-structured interview schedule, the use of policy-loaded language and the focus on 'barriers' to paid work.

Accessing potential respondents through the employment service proved problematic. Firstly, this was problematic in a practical sense as the New Deal in this locality only had an average of 19 'clients' each week at this time (Local Employment Service Statistics 2000) and few responded to requests for research participation. The socio-economic characteristics of the localities from where this research was conducted is detailed later on in this chapter with reference to the final sample generated. However, defining features were a low unemployment rate compared to national averages (3% of the adult working population compared with 5%); higher average housing prices and rent levels due to the South East location, and pockets of areas that are ranked as high levels of multiple deprivation along with some of the highest income wards in the country (ONS 2003). The responses I received from a mail out to over 80 potential participants led to a reply from three lone parents. One of these was a lone father and two others were lone mothers. I discovered that these lone parents were all involved in the local New Deal pilot scheme and had often 'spoken out' about lone parents' experiences. They appeared to be vocal lone parents who had a story to tell about their difficulties in taking up or maintaining

paid work. It became clear to me that the employment service, as a route for accessing participants, was not only problematic in the sense of the few numbers that came forward, but the discussions with interviewees tended to centre the desirability of paid work focusing on how to move into work rather than questioning the centring of paid work in mothers' lives. While this is a significant area to consider, much research had been conducted on 'barriers to work' in the structural sense but I was actually more concerned with the currency that paid work participation had in the context of their lives, circumstances and understandings of motherhood. This issue had been examined to a lesser extent in the prevailing literature. The beginning of the research, developed mainly from desk-work reading, while sensitising me to the theoretical and empirical issues of the subject, felt like a gulf away from accessing the complexities of lived experiences.

This phase of the research developed into an exploratory stage and initial immersion into the field (Corbin and Strauss 1997). I set about discussing issues of caring and paid work with a number of significant agencies, professional, lone parent representative groups and lone mothers (mainly drawn from my own social networks) in order to sensitise myself to the range of representations, the 'definitions of the problem'¹ these encounters produced. Encouraging a broad dialogue across different professional agencies and lone mothers in my own social networks, provided a stark picture of some dominant discourses around lone motherhood. Immersion in the issues helped me to see the various ways lone mothers' lives were constructed through perceptions of the 'problem' and the social implications of making particular claims. Moreover, what was emphasised as central issues related closely to their immersion in particular institutional contexts. For example, a number of family centre workers viewed lone mothers as vulnerable in relation to poverty as well as in coping emotionally and practically as mothers. Lone mothers here were seen viewed through social work discourses of needs, coping strategies, vulnerability and stress and situated

¹ A notion of the definition of the problem was developed by Goffman (1974) who devised the concept of 'frame' to relate to the way issues are framed through meanings and language in particular contexts. I am using the notion of 'definition of the problem' to refer to the way respondents emphasised certain issues as relevant and others as irrelevant in their ordering of accounts.

within the local context of their client group. For example, a family centre manager with a social work background viewed his clients as vulnerable in the context of their locality:

“ The mothers here have a lot of family problems. This area has poor housing, not much job opportunities, no place for youngsters..the new estate is particularly bad. We offer a place to meet, a safe place to talk to friends and advice on courses, benefits or work if they are ready for that” (Family centre 1 manager).

For the New Deal Advisors, lone parents more generally were at the receiving end of a number of political and administrative processes. According to the New Deal Advisors and New Deal Manager, lone parents were not receiving the appropriate ‘message’ about the many opportunities for them that the New Deal offers, which caused frustration and anxiety about meeting performance targets. The personal advisers who I spoke with (one was a manager and another a PA at the employment service) essentially upheld the notion of paid work as beneficial as well as their service as being about support and opportunity over regulation.

One strategy I adopted in the hope of establishing a ‘rapport’ was to openly acknowledge my own concerns, difficulties and experiences as a lone mother. This was an attempt to utilise a position of ‘insider’ and shared experience in the research process, which could break down perceptions of expert researcher versus subject (Finch 1984). The sharing of experiences has long been a principle within feminist research praxis as a means of presenting oneself not as an aloof, expert of scientific knowledge but as a person with similar experiences, curiosities and subjective values / meanings shared with others (Oakley 1981). Again, however, the response was unpredictable. Some of the respondents in the earlier explorative interviews responded little to the knowledge of my own family circumstances, others engaged with me in a discussion of comparing experiences which was more akin to developing a friendship based on consensus rather than a critical research interview, while others still questioned and pointed out significant differences between our experiences in their eyes. One obvious issue, which actually surprised me at the time although it clearly should have been realised, was the assumption that as a postgraduate student I was clearly on

the side of supporting a work ethic and career advancement. For example, one early respondent often said that it was her opinion that she should care for her children first, that she was aware others didn't see things that way and that she didn't want to criticise those who study or work:

"I know many people do work but I don't want to. I know many women do it that way but ..well at the moment I have my daughter to think about and then there is the older one. She has just moved in with her boyfriend.." (Belinda, 37, working class white woman)

Another said I wanted to find out 'how to be a good mother':

"Have you got kids?"

H: "Yes, one she's four."

"Ah so you want to find out how to be a good mother!!"

H: " Well, more interested in what people think a good mother is really, if people have similar ideas.." (Patricia, 34, white working class woman)

For some of the mothers, it was important to them that I did not claim to share their experiences as this asserted a position of 'knowing their experience' when they felt they had particularly personal experiences. This was the 'objective expert position' situation that was raised earlier in the discussion as unacceptable. The ethics of sharing my experiences and values became a significant issue. Many respondents, positioned me as privileged or 'expert' due to perceptions of status and social location. This will be developed in the account below of the research interview.

At this stage, I also began to challenge my own assumptions and beliefs and the extent to which I was constructing the research to produce particular sorts of accounts. It is inevitable, as discussed earlier, that a researcher cannot escape the way they shape a research inquiry as they pose the question for study, design the approach and interpret their 'findings'. As a researcher identifies lone motherhood as a phenomenon worthy of inquiry, they are at the same time constructing a category of similarity and difference that people themselves may not identify with or ascribe a similar meaning to. As a researcher, when I introduced the research as a study about lone mothers or an interest in hearing about lone mothers' experiences, I was asserting categories of existence. To

define the research and label people in terms of family type in this way was to simultaneously assert that the social world was categorised by these terms. However, during some of the pilot interviews some of the respondents were 'doing things with words' that suggested a different way of categorising their social world. For example, one of the pilot questions asked about the term 'lone parent'. I noted in my research diary the limitations of this question:

Have you heard the term 'lone parent', do you use it?

What do you think of the term lone parent?

- **Do you think it applies to you? Do you think of yourself as a lone parent?**
- **What term do you use or most commonly hear? Would you prefer a different term?**

This question is going well in terms of finding out what people think of the term but several have strongly said 'they don't think that way' or 'don't see things that way' so is this question really a good one? It addresses a term people may not think about or have much to say about. This question doesn't give the feeling that you are there to hear about how they see things. I will ask this question later on if it comes up. I am asking this question in order to explore the 'discourses of lone parenthood', which will be apparent throughout the interview as a whole – so these will be followed up as it arises.

Added to these various representations of the 'problems' for lone mothers were other indications that moved the research towards considering issues of the socially constructed nature of accounts and language use.

Following from this stage of exploration the research questions and design was reframed to be more flexible and concentrated on issues of subjective understandings, identities and situated constructions of social worlds. The interview approach became more flexible beginning with an exploration of issues of biography and context followed by explorations of policy relevant issues as they arose in the interview. The need to analyse data according to the implications of claims / discursive positioning, and not merely in terms of the substantive issues became apparent. The changes in the research design came to involve an appreciation of the significance of social interaction - within the research setting and in an everyday sense - as the site of meaning construction and negotiation of identities (Jenkins 1996). The significance of the performative

aspects of language and the positioning of accounts became a focal interest further developed through an exploration of social constructionism. This necessitated a more focused research design with fewer interviewees so that interviews could be more extensive.

Reformulating the research questions and methodological approach:

The emerging research concern now became a matter of gathering accounts of how mothers represented the risks, resources and opportunities in their lives. The key research questions aimed to elicit presentations of identity and social positioning so that aspects of agency, subjectivity and identity could be unravelled. The research questions were:

- How do mothers construct meanings and experiences of lone motherhood?
- How do they position their experiences and identities in relation to these meanings and representations?
- How do women construct and negotiate the wider commitments, risks, constraints and resources in their lives as mothers? In total how do they position themselves in relation to their wider social worlds?

I now planned to conduct around 45 in-depth topic led interviews with lone mothers. As with much qualitative research, I did not attempt to produce a representative sample. Instead, I planned to recruit mothers through a variety of access routes such as family centres, schools, community centres, my own networks, a lone parent group, adult education courses, employers and snowballing across some of the localities in the city. The interviews would ask about issues of biography, routes into lone motherhood, maternal responsibilities, caring and providing for children, current priorities, social networks and social support. During data collection and data analysis the exploration of meanings would focus on issues of values, practices, resources, identity positioning, social representations and mothers' priorities. The research also involved taking steps to maintain ethical standards and integrity in the relationship between the research participants and myself.

Characteristics of the locality:

The city in which this study was based and the respondents lived, includes a contrast of localities according to many socio-economic characteristics. The city centre includes many of the highest average income wards in the UK according to the Index of Income and Deprivation (ONS 2003). The city on the whole had a lower than average unemployment rate at 3% in 2000 (Census 2001 ONS 2003). The city has a large student population which leads to higher levels of young people aged under 20 living in the city compared to national averages (ONS 2003). 37% of adults aged between 16-74 have undergraduate degrees compared with 20% at the national average (ONS 2003). The significance of tourism and academic studies in the city contributes to a higher than average level of movement in and out of the city as well as a mixture of cultures and ethnic groups (ONS 2003).

However, there are several pockets of higher unemployment, fewer job opportunities and more concentrated social housing. Many of the research participants (detailed below) lived in two of these areas – Billborough and Camdene. Billborough is ranked in the top 20 most deprived wards in the UK and is located on the outskirts of the city. Many local narratives of high crime rates, drug abuse and anti-social behaviour circulate about this area. Indeed this area became well known for deprivation and unemployment during reporting of ‘riots’ on rundown estates in the early 1990’s. The area is made of two large, mostly social housing estates. One of the estates is newer and stretches out to the outskirts of the city even further. Both of these estates are around four miles in distance from the city centre and offer few local job opportunities. Evidence of these characteristics have won the area successive regeneration funding which has been used to develop local public facilities such as a children’s play area, a community centre, an early education programme, traffic calming measures, CCTV and a family centre. The other area stretches out in the southern direction of the city – Camdene. This area is smaller in geographical size but has received recent attention from the city council as an area with few job opportunities, few local services and less reliable public transport (Carter 2001).

A higher than average amount of people are also live alone in the city. In the city, 35% of people live alone compared to 30% for the national average. In 2001, 50% of the population were single never married, compared with 30% for the national average, while only 35% were married compared to 51% at the national level (ONS 2003). There were around national levels of lone parent households; as a proportion of all households this stood at 7% (6% nationally) (ONS 2003).

Generating a research sample:

To generate a research sample, many settings were targeted through a variety of strategies. These were:

- ◆ Family centres;
- ◆ Adult education centres;
- ◆ Employees;
- ◆ Lone parent groups;
- ◆ Local public services, such as community centres.

I approached women and managers in these settings to inform them about the research and generate interest in the research. I also produced publicity material, which was advertised in family centres, the employment service, public notices and community centres. Five respondents replied to these notices. Six further respondents were recruited through existing respondents contacting members of their social networks.

First of all, family centres and lone parent groups in the city were visited. There are six family centres in the city. The first family centre, FC1 that I visited was located in Billborough. The centre was funded largely through the social service departments and tended to run a number of open drop-in sessions, offered low cost activities and meals, and ran a number of daytime activities such as decorating classes for adults. I met the manager, who was trained as a social worker, who introduced me to some of the 'regular' mothers during a drop in session. Catherine, Nina, Belinda and Tracy agreed to take part in the study.

Around three of the women at the morning drop-in session did not respond to my requests for interviewees. This could have been because they did not consider they were lone mothers which I clearly stated was my research target group, or it could have been due to a lack of interest in participating in research. These participants preferred to be interviewed at the family centre, possibly because they attended daily and could trust friends to watch their children during the interview (a private room in the family centre was available for interviews). These women had pre-school aged children and were unlikely to work full-time as the morning session was during the week.

The second family centre, FC2, is situated in another area of relatively higher levels of social housing. This area is also an area of high private rented accommodation, higher proportions of ethnic minorities and a large student cohort. This setting also involved accessing participants through a gatekeeper – the centre manager. Two participants were recruited through this access setting. A further participant agreed to be interviewed but then later cancelled. These two participants, Rasheene and Melissa, also had pre-school aged children. Both were regular attendants at the family centre. I interviewed Rasheene in her own home, while Melissa preferred to meet at the family centre.

The third family centre, FC3 was also situated in one of the estates with higher social housing in the city. This estate was on the Northern outskirts of the city. I visited the family centre, and spoke to some of the mothers who attended the drop-in session. There were two mothers there who did not wish to be interviewed. One was willing to talk to me about her views on the New Deal Scheme at that time but did not want to arrange an interview as she said she did not have time to do this.

I visited one more family centre, which had recently expanded with Sure Start funding. The centre had a larger number of parents and children attending. There was a focal public café, which the parents ran themselves and many adult education courses. I met with the family centre manager who gave me permission to talk to the parents attending the centre. I introduced the research

as about lone parents' experiences of parenting and doing paid work or training. Three of the mothers agreed to be interviewed in their own homes.

The implication of generating these participants through family centres in the city was that they had pre-school aged children (as well as older children). Many also were social services 'clients' receiving welfare professional support. I also came to suspect the degree to which participation was totally voluntary when approaching women in these settings through family centre managers. It is likely that some of these women felt obliged to participate, although many also refused, and voluntary participation was stressed in the process of explaining the research.

The other access routes involved sending out information about the research through public sector employment mailing lists and public notices at schools and community services. I also received permission to talk to a group of women attending an adult education centre. I was keen to reach lone mothers with older children, who were undertaking training or paid work. Seven of the respondents were accessed from this training project while nine replied to public adverts. Two further respondents agreed to take part after they were contacted through the training scheme for which they worked as crèche workers.

There was a contrast between these last two respondents, both of which felt distanced themselves from the category of 'lone mother', and other participants. In terms of the type of accounts generated in the interviews, some of the respondents who replied directly to public adverts seemed to have 'told their story' on many occasions. Three of these respondents had been involved in previous research projects in the locality! In fact one also put herself forward for another related project about the costs of primary education for low-income parents, which I was involved in a year later! Both of these projects had left leaflets on the information desks / boards at local schools. Many of the respondents who replied to public notices, which I left in GP surgeries, schools, public notices, family centres, local public sector employer mail outs and adult education centres, tended to present a coherent story as a lone mother that involved either oppression or successful coping. For example, Janet replied to an

advert I sent via an employer mail out. She presented forceful values and stories of the oppressive nature of lone motherhood:

"So generally. If you can describe what single parenting is like how would you describe it?"

It's hard and it is under estimated, it is not respected. There is not enough respect for women who are working very hard to keep families together, body and soul...It is very difficult to describe...I think women deserve respect a lot more than they do get....Margaret Thatcher actually said a few years ago that single mothers should go to nunneries and learn parenting skills, I was so angry. Because it is the women that are actually saving the children...it is the women that are sacrificing, living in poverty. They are living under very isolated conditions a lot of the time and they are being chastised for it when they are doing the job on their own. When the men are not...It is the men that are walking off from the relationships, it is the men that are choosing not to have any more contact with their children." (Janet, 45, white working class woman)

Janet went on to say that she wanted to do this interview because she wanted to voice these concerns. This was one of the earlier research interviews, in which I felt largely unable to intervene to ask questions. Janet talked quickly with little interruption! This is not to dismiss the validity of Janet's values and understandings, but her response was in marked contrast to the way some of the other women seemed to be attempting to construct a story about lone motherhood afresh as a response to my questions in an interview setting. In contrast the two other participants who I recruited through the adult education centre, said they felt there were not 'lone mothers'. These two participants actually distanced themselves from the category of 'lone mother' although they 'fitted' the public policy definitions. For example, Katlin says:

"I know what people mean if it comes up. But I don't think about it. I am just a mum" (Katlin, 27, white working class woman).

Another significant access route was the local lone parent group. There were two groups in the city. From one group, seven mothers were recruited while one from the other group agreed to participate.

The strategy of using several access routes was in an attempt to reach a broad range of circumstances in terms of employment, children's age, income and

living arrangements. These aspects of context could then be examined in relation to family values, practices and understandings.

Diagram 2.1: Access routes and networks of connections

Setting	Number of respondents recruited	Study names
Family centres	9	Catherine, Nicola, Belinda, Tracy, Rasheene, Melissa, Kimberley, Justine, Sue.
Adult Education Centre	8	Cath, Cathy, Mary, Danni, Amanda, Lauren, Hazel and Katlin.
Replies to public responses	9	Janet, Mandy, Lucinda, Geeta, Mia, Sarah, Beverley, Patricia, Denise.
Lone Parent Groups	8	Heather, Lea, Kirsty, Maria, Jan, Becky, Trisha, Susan
A local playgroup	1	Christine
Snowballing the networks of existing respondents	8	Kathleen, Mertha, Tamara, Estelle, Natasha, Emily and Elizabeth, Nina.
Total:	43	43

The sample was broad in terms of the social background and circumstances of participants, which is useful in exploring the variety of subjective experiences and social contexts. In terms of the material circumstances of the respondents, in line with national figures, all of the respondents reported household weekly incomes that were below the national average. Denise had the highest income at £19 000 a year for her part-time public sector managerial employment. Mandy had the second highest income as a support worker earning £16 000 a year. The average weekly income among the respondents was £162. This is slightly below the national average.

In terms of the class position, from their current income all of these women were living on low incomes – below the national average income (Bradshaw 2001). However, class location is complex to evaluate. There are many indicators of trajectories of class such as educational level, income, employment status or savings. Further, individual incomes may be supplemented with contributions from family networks utilising the social capital and class position of family members. In line with the higher than average proportions of adults with degree level qualifications, seven of the research participants had degree qualifications. However, categorising the participants according to class was problematic when in the present period they had low incomes but altered in their biographical class trajectories in terms of human and social capital. In this sample, I also took the position of asking women their class status. Most of the women claimed a class status in relation to their overall life experiences.

The table below details other key characteristics of the research sample. Some groups are well under-represented in this sample, although the research does not attempt to make conclusions based on a representative sample of lone mothers. These groups most notably include lesbian mothers, ethnic minorities, and families with disability or health issues.

Several of the respondents described their ethnicity as Asian (2) and Black Afro-Caribbean (4). Half of the respondents received income support benefit, while a further eight received Working Families Tax Credit. Fourteen received some form of maintenance from their child’s father that could range from a legalised divorced settlement to the occasional help with costs. The numbers of mothers receiving tax credits and maintenance in this sample are higher than UK averages noted in the literature review.

Table 2.1: Some characteristics of the research sample:

Benefit Status / sources of income	No of Sample
Income Support	25
Working Families Tax Credit	8

Disability / Incapacity Benefits	1
Widow Benefits	2
Maternity benefits (employer and state)	1
Maintenance	14
Total Sample	43
Total claims	50

Work status	
Part-time working	17
Full-time working	7
Voluntary Work	11
Total Sample	43
Total number of mothers involved in part-time, full-time or voluntary work	35

Age	No in Sample
Below 20	0
20 - 25	2
26 - 30	14
31- 35	13
36- 40	10
41- 45	4
Total Sample	43

No of Children	Sample
1	19
2	8
3	12
4	1
5	3
Total Sample:	43

No of Pre-school Children	
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1	19
2	3
Total Sample	43
Total with pre-school children	22

Current Marital Status	
Divorced	14
Separated (from cohabitation and marriage)	19
Single at birth	6
Widow	3
Total Sample	43

Twenty-four of the mothers were involved in some form of paid work. A large proportion had pre-school children – nineteen of the participants, and most had smaller families with one or two children. The main route into lone motherhood was through relationship separation whether this was from a marital or cohabiting relationship. The sample will be detailed in the finding chapters where I examine the routes into lone motherhood and meanings of lone motherhood.

The Interview Encounter:

The interview schedule was designed to provide some open-ended questions around some broad topics from which to launch a 'guided' conversation (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). These topics were informed by the research question and earlier pilot interviews. The topic guide was used as a flexible resource for asking questions that invited longer narratives and explorations of meaning (Miller 1999; Letherby 2003). The majority of the interviews were carried out from June 2000 until August 2001. On six occasions the interview took place either at a workplace (2) or at the family centre (4). These factors shape the type of account produced (see analysis section later on in this chapter). The interviews typically lasted around two hours although some stretched to three hours and others lasted one hour and a half. Many of the interviews were conducted with children present. The presence of children sometimes disrupted the interview as our discussion stopped and started. However, on the whole most

of the mothers were adept at conducting conversations while attending to children. Flexibility in when and where the research took place often led to weekend / evening visits, all of which had some significance for data analysis. As soon as possible after each interview I wrote down an account of the interview in my research diary. I also asked the respondents some questions through a short postal questionnaire of their experiences of taking part in the research. This elicited some interesting responses.

While conducting interviews many aspects of the interview as a social interaction also embedded in power relations became apparent. My own reactions co-constructed the focus and depth of the data. Some of the interviews, on reflection, had many examples of bland or presumptuous responses, where meanings were not critically explored and common sense / shared understandings were taken for granted. For example, in the extract below, on reflection, there are leading questions apparent in this extract:

H: "So is it like constant?"

S: "Yes it is just constant. It's getting a change of scene. It's getting out and getting a bit of your own space cos even in the evenings when they are in bed and you are getting a break from them but you need to actually get away from the house environment cos you see the toys and all the things around that remind you of the children. You need a break completely away from the children."

H: "When was the last time you had a break?"

S: "Well, when their Dad comes down. I'll try and get an hour out. Even if it is just to go shopping. Just shopping without the children is wonderful. Just none of the – Mum can I have this and can I have that? Oh you know, I just want to get it done and get home. Just relax - Ohh ohh the pressure it is just horrible!! Sometimes. So then you can just switch off and do it in your own time. That's wonderful. Just look at what you want to look at...//". (Susan, 36, white middle class woman)

My use of 'constant' gives little direction for Susan to demonstrate to me what she means. My use of the phrase 'break' asks for more factual knowledge, that is revealing, but doesn't open up issues of what Susan means by 'a break'.

There is also the issue of each participant as feeling, embodied individuals whose re-counting of experiences involves emotion. Added to the intensely moral terrain of mothering, a notion of the psycho-social or defended subject is relevant (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001). The defended subject has been coined by Jefferson and Hollway to refer to the emotive basis of social interactions and communicative responses (Jefferson and Hollway 2000). These researchers found in their study about fear of crime, that some responses could be explained in terms of underlying anxieties deeply embedded in a subject's subconscious and biographical experiences. Interviewees then are not merely responding in a rational way to their experiences, the talk and discourse also reveals emotive anxieties. While this notion has not been taken up extensively in this study, I was certainly aware of emotive responses that I have taken up as issues of moral identity in the later chapters.

These responses, assumptions and emotions become part of the data collection process and illustrate the co-constructed nature of qualitative data (Song and Parker 1995; Oakley 1981). While the aim was to elicit explorations of meanings, I found it difficult at first to interrogate the meanings that participants portrayed, as I did not want to be seemingly critical or judgmental. This led to some avenues of meaning being left in a very ambiguous state. This was the case with the example earlier where Jane took a clear position in relation to the oppression lone mothers' faced. The issue of judgement was extremely complex to negotiate as a researcher aware of the moral terrain of motherhood, especially how working class women have been labelled as 'immoral' at the same time as wanting to produce rigorous and rich research data.

At times as a researcher, it felt as if I was sitting in judgement on these women's lives. This was not intentional, and is part of the artificial one-way conversation in a research interview. The respondent is invited to 'open up' with a research purpose in mind (Birch, Miller et al 2002). There is clearly a power relationship between the researcher and respondent.

Some of the interviews involved extremely moving accounts. This was especially the case in accounts of violence and abuse. These accounts were

could be painful to disclose for the respondents. For example, in Mandy's account below, as a researcher it may have been interesting to pursue why Mandy felt it she owed it to her husband to have a baby, although this did not seem appropriate in the interview. The following extract illustrates this:

*"When Hilary was sixteen months old, I met this bloke called Graham, and he was sort of the next boyfriend. I didn't kind of have loads!! We got engaged and got married....so I got on this housing scheme. I got married and Graham wanted to have children, **he wanted loads of children!!** I was like ..NO! I don't want to have loads of children. So we had Cherry because I felt like I owed it to him. [pause and sigh] Anyway that went disastrously wrong. Do you want me to tell you about that?"*

H: *"If you feel comfortable with that. Mainly, what I am looking at is trying to understand where you are coming from...your story if you like. So.."*

"Well, it isn't very nice. He is currently in prison for sexually abusing both of the kids. So that didn't go down very well. [Oh no, Oh no] So the marriage broke up. We were married 11 years and when Hilary came to me and told me this had been going on....so a divorce followed. It cost me a fortune!!" (Mandy, 34 years old, white working class woman).

The interview encounter also presents many other ethical considerations (Birch et al 2002). Two respondents asked for advice and welfare support during the course of an interview. One of these women, an Asian woman, had suffered domestic violence and lived a fairly housebound existence to avoid contact with the local Asian community. During this interview, the interviewee was seeking advice on how to access childcare help. While I offered some advice (such as approaching social services or home start), it was also important to point out that I was not a welfare professional but a student researcher. I felt deeply compelled by her story which provided a stark example of the meanings around domestic violence and marital separation as an Asian woman. I attempted to listen to and understand her situation. However, the interview raised many ethical dilemmas as I felt compelled to provide some reassurance or enhance the interviewee's capacity to value her actions. At the end of the interview, the participant stated she would return to her abusive husband if she received no help. There was the opportunity to forward a contact for an Asian woman's worker in the local social services but the key point here is that the vulnerability of both interviewer and interviewee seemed to be sharply brought into focus. It is the vulnerability of the

interviewee, however, that seems particularly marked. Rasheene starts the interview by disclosing her experiences, but the extent to which this is her choice is unclear:

H: "Can you tell me about your life since you left school?"

R: "I left school when I was about 16. My parents.. I had an arranged marriage."

H: "Was that in Otterworth?"

R: "No..I am not.. don't know if I can say..I am fleeing domestic violence. And I came to Otterworth for refuge." (Rasheene, 26, Asian woman)

At times the interviewees perceived that I had a broader professional role and could help them access welfare services. At other times, they acknowledged rarely 'discussing these things with others' but did so as 'this is an interview'. The boundaries between friendship / researcher were also problematic in some cases. Eight of the interviewees were part of my own social networks as I was also a member of one of the local lone parent groups. This also raised many issues in relation to the interview encounter. It was clear in several of these interviews that accounts were produced differently within the context of an interview as opposed to a conversation. One particular interviewee recounted a very different version of their experiences than that I had heard from them previously. In particular her moral innocence was higher on the agenda in the research encounter. Many details of her story were 'missed out' although we both shared an alternative understanding based on previous discussions. This issue is taken up in the research further as indicating the significance of moral identity to accounts of mothering. In three other interviews with members of my own social networks, the interviewee quite rightly indicated the 'obviousness' of my questions given our shared knowledge of each other's personal narratives. These issues indicate the difficulties of 'critically examining assumptions' in the context of relationships where there are already large stocks of shared understandings assumed.

Alongside and after the period of data collection, I transcribed the interviews and noted down my reactions and impressions of the interviews. The transcription

took note of emphasised changes in tone, breaks in speaking and silences as suggested by Cameron (2001). Although some of the non-verbal communication was lost in this process, I attempted to capture aspects of this during the interview, in my research diary and by re-listening to tapes during data analysis (Coffey and Atkinson 1996; Mason 1996). At this point I tried to remain close to the respondents' language as a principle of capturing how women talk about mothering. Skeggs and Standing have both discussed the ways that middle class researchers invalidate working class language use through 'cleaning up the text' (Standing 1998; Skeggs 1994). However, when the transcripts were sent out to respondents for comments, one replied with criticism that I made her sound inarticulate and she would like the ums, arhs and half sentences removed for quoting purposes. By the stage of writing up the research I was more concerned to balance issues of close representation with integrity of the respondent (Standing 1998).

Once transcribed, I downloaded the data into a computer analysis package. The first package I tried was NuDIST, which I had received instruction in. However, this package was more suited to cross-sectional analysis than narrative analysis because it 'split up the data' into small segments. After attending a training day for Atlas.ti, I transferred to this package as I found it useful to have the whole transcript, memo facilities and coding maps all on the interface of the computer at one time. Atlas provides links between your data, notes and coding frames so that each facility is connected to the other and accessible on the computer screen. The whole transcript is maintained on the screen so that larger segments can be worked on and coded (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). The relative strengths and weaknesses of various computer-assisted programmes are much debated. I found Atlas more accessible and suitable for my purpose.

Analysis of data:

Qualitative data analysis can be conducted in a variety of ways (Coffey and Atkinson 1996; Dey 1993; Mason 1996; Silverman 2001; Cameron 2001; Corbin and Strauss 1997; Bryman and Burgess 1994). Analysis of course is part of the whole research process and by this stage I had thought through many aspects of data collection and thematic illuminations during the interview process. The

analytical approach I devised was eclectic towards these approaches. I aimed to explore the interviews as narratives, which refers to concentrating on the text as a whole (Coffey and Atkinson 1996), to decipher discourses / sets of connected statements as well as cross examining sections of data across transcripts through the use of codes. The analytical inquiry was focused on questions of how the participants positioned their selves and others, and in relation to constructions of the 'social'.

At the beginning of data analysis I was unsure about how to conduct an analysis that could bring together these concerns. As a relatively inexperienced empirical researcher, I looked for a clear set of instructions to follow as a recipe for the steps through analysis (Letherby 2003). Further exploration into analytical approaches usually served to confuse and expand the issues rather than resolve (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). Through what felt like a painful process of moving forward and stagnation, the need for a creative self-led approach to organising and analysing the data emerged. This process has been called one of developing authorship and authority as a researcher, as a researcher structures the purpose of the analysis and the focus of analytical development (Stacey 1991). While it was important to be thoroughly clear about the significant issues for the research respondents, the analytical process involves the researcher in attempts to explain why these issues are so significant.

Overall the analysis moved backwards and forwards through many stages activities, which were:

- ◆ Reading the data;
- ◆ Analytically organising the data into themes / summaries;
- ◆ Producing diagrams, charts and table that could illustrate relationships between themes / codes / whole stories;
- ◆ Analysing features / aspects of the data;
- ◆ Reading –analysing the literature;
- ◆ Reflexively thinking about the data in relation to theory and concepts;

- ◆ Reflexively thinking about the data and the research process / role of the researcher.

I began by producing summaries of each account as suggested by methodology texts (Miles and Huberman 1994; Mason 1996; Coffey and Atkinson 1996), noting the key features such as the respondent's constructions of their biography, the story-line of their experiences, key relationships, concerns and priorities, self and group identifications, positioning and acknowledgement of discourses / public representations, elaborated meanings and what was left unsaid. I undertook several training courses to aid my understanding of deconstruction techniques. I then developed a coding frame that was applied across transcripts. Using these two approaches did present some difficulties as the respondents framed their accounts in very different ways. This was useful for my research as it clearly presented issues of context and identity. However, codes then needed to be broad enough to include this variety. For this reason the coding frames were broad with further sub-sections. Overall this coding exercise helped me to be selective and organise the data in ways that may illuminate useful theoretical issues.

Both of these approaches allowed for issues of commonality and difference across respondents to be analysed. However, the cross transcript thematic analysis seemed to fragment the individual stories in significant ways (Letherby 2003). The contradiction between a focus on understanding the context of one account while reviewing the salient features across accounts was hard to reconcile. I went through a process of writing detailed papers for each respondent, contextualising their meanings and positionings in relation to other parts of the text. I wanted to fully represent their experiences and meanings as much as possible. However, I then turned more fully to writing reports according to codes and themes comparing the salient issues across transcripts, although I felt the particularity and details of each account could not then be fully recognised. In future research an emphasis on depth or breadth of qualitative data will need to be decided from the outset.

Writing up the research:

The accounts of mothering and caring in the context of lone motherhood, low income and social change that this study has generated and analysed presented alternative issues, concerns and experiences. At the write up stage much emphasis is on how to order your research account to produce a 'coherent' whole (Miller 1999). The framework for chapters went through many versions, and in the end a thematic account of subjective experiences was settled on. One attempt at ordering the chapters separated out issues at the individual, local and wider social context. While this will be an insightful avenue to pursue in future research, the interconnections between these levels of analysis has been presented in a more holistic way under thematic areas of concern.

In the next five chapters, the substantive findings of this study are presented. Part one sets out some overall patterns across the accounts of lone motherhood in terms of representations and positioning in relation to the category of lone mother. The second part shifts towards a focus on perspectives on their maternal responsibilities and balancing motherhood with paid work.

Part 2: Becoming A Lone Mother

Chapter Three

Lone Motherhood: Subjective Meanings, Welfare Status and Welfare

Claims.

Introduction:

This chapter is concerned with identifying the range of meanings associated with lone motherhood and the representations of 'lone mother' as a social category, source of identity and welfare status. I will set out several main dimensions of lone motherhood that provided some core meanings across the accounts of what it means to be a lone mother. In terms of identifying with these constructions of a 'lone mother' there were also some overarching social processes of claims for welfare, support, autonomy or choice in the presentation of self along these dimensions. Socially positioning oneself as a lone mother or distancing oneself from such a category involved claims of agency or need.

Overall what signified 'lone motherhood' was a sense of 'being / feeling alone'. Meanings of being alone as a mother were constructed around several dimensions of parenting / partnering / domestic relations. Being 'alone' in relation to family life was understood in a variety of ways for which the study developed the following categories:

- Being alone as forming a single adult household;
- Being alone as separation from the biological father;
- Being alone as lack of paternal involvement;
- Being alone as being unsupported and under-resourced;
- Being alone as lonely;
- Being alone as isolated;
- Being alone as being a single woman in terms of partnerships;
- Being alone as being an independent autonomous woman;
- Being alone as solo responsibility.

Each of these meanings could be assigned to a varied set of experiences and circumstances. The ontological embodied nature of meanings, the extent to which an individual 'felt' alone in these senses was greatly subjective, in the sense that they could not be read off from circumstances in a straight forward way.

These meanings have been regrouped below into constructions of lone motherhood:

1. living alone;
2. separated from the biological father;
3. mothering alone;
4. being single from a partnership;

This chapter will go on to demonstrate the significance of these meanings. As each dimension of lone motherhood is reviewed, I will go on to set out the wider significance of these meanings in terms of difference and disadvantage. These dimensions of lone motherhood were meaningful to the mothers' as they provided a source of difference or disadvantage. They are also linked to perceptions of welfare claims. Values and assumptions around dependency / independency; needs / rights; separateness and connectedness; gender, motherhood and 'individuality' are key to understanding the discursive positioning around meanings of lone motherhood.

Being alone as living alone:

Being a 'lone mother' in many cases was related to 'living alone' with your dependent children. To see a lone mother as meaning a mother who lives alone with her children converges with the official categorisation of families according to household form. In this study women did claim 'lone mother status' along these lines. However, some of the participants were not living alone but still saw themselves as lone mothers, others saw themselves as lone mothers before they were the only adult in a household, around a fifth of participants were unable to secure independent housing, while others lived alone but were uncertain if they

were really 'mothering alone'. How can we explain these tensions that illustrate the limitations of viewing lone mother households as an adequate indicator of experiences and meanings of lone motherhood? We need to appreciate the layers of meaning associated with being alone as a mother. Before I set out these alternative meanings, I will focus on the how far 'being alone as living alone' resonates with the data from this study in the sense of who objectively could be said to fall into this category.

The table below illustrates the 'fit' between the official definition of a lone parent as a lone parent household and this research sample:

Table 3.1 Living Arrangements and the Research Sample

Housing / Household Arrangement	Number of Participants
Living alone with dependent children	36
- In temporary accommodation	2
- in social housing	26
- in privately rented housing	6
- home owner	2
Shared Housing	7
- living with parents	2
- living with friends	3
- home owner with lodger/s	2

A general impression from the table above is that the majority of women within this sample did form lone parent households. However, two further issues emerge – this more objective definition could be in contradiction to subjective understandings where a mother living alone with her children may not see herself as a lone mother, and secondly, securing housing in itself was a major source of difficulty for many of the mothers. Indeed, in many ways becoming a lone mother household was dependent on a woman's ability to secure independent housing through claims for welfare / public supported housing and constrained agency in the housing market. Those who were not lone parent households were

in the main unable to live alone due to difficulty in securing the material resources needed to afford independent housing or due to a sense of 'choice' that it was not necessary to live alone with your children when you are single. Living alone with your children did have some wider meaning as a significant measure of your status as a 'lone' mother, but was the result of successfully claiming welfare support on the basis of low income or lone motherhood status. This can be demonstrated by examining these women's experiences and looking at the struggles for meaning and identification that appeared within these women's accounts.

If we examine the constructions of meanings around lone motherhood, for those who were not living as a lone parent household but who identified as a lone parent family, we can see the alternative conceptions of 'being a lone mother' that they were using and in one case the tension between seeing living alone as 'being alone' and other senses of 'being alone'.

There were two participants who were uncertain if they could claim to be 'properly on their own' and four who were living in a household with another adult also living in that household but who did see themselves as a 'lone mother'. The two participants who were uncertain about claims to be 'lone mothers' felt they were the main carer and had the majority of the responsibility. They were signifying the meanings of 'alone' as involving mothering alone and parental separation. However, in both cases the biological father was also involved in caring on a weekly basis. This raised questions for the participants' sense of their belonging to the category of 'lone mother' and produced some interesting accounts of similarity and difference between their lived experiences as a lone mother and the 'norm' of mothering alone among this social group. They constructed a stereotype of the lone mother family where the father was absent and not involved in any way. More importantly as a matter of the social processes that these meanings were tied to, both these mothers were dubious about their claims for support as lone mothers.

Sarah began her account of mothering alone by placing herself quite squarely within this category of lone mother on the basis of having separated from her

child's father and now living alone. She marks the event of her ex-partner moving out as the start of becoming a 'lone mother' but is also very concerned with the implications of 'being alone' as 'being unsupported' and as 'a lack of father involvement' which she felt described her mother's experience as a lone mother and her own childhood:

"But that was, when I was contemplating splitting up with my daughter's father, Oh the tears!! Oh it took me so long and I was so scared. Because I had such an awful experience being from a single parent family in my childhood.

I had to have counselling about it because it was very hard to distinguish what was the reality, and what was my fears from the past about me and my childhood. I just thought it was the most awful thing I could do to myself, to my child, to the father. You know, it was just a really really traumatic time for me."

H: *"Can you remember specifically what you were scared about?"*

*"A lot of it was just hooked up from the past and a lot of it was just gut instinct and fear. Fear of being alone. And the reality in the first six months was almost as bad as my fears. **Because he left and I was then there.**" (Sarah, 36, white middle class woman)*

At several times Sarah marks 'lone motherhood' from the time her partner moved out. Talking about her daughter's reaction after she separated from her ex-partner, Sarah says:

"She was really reacting against my fear and insecurity about being a single parent and the fact that her father had moved out." (Sarah, 36, white middle class woman)

However, her child's father has continued to have regular contact with her daughter. According to Sarah this makes her experience different from most other lone mothers:

"I am sort of defining the difference between me and a lot of the single parents, well any single parent I know, is that I am very lucky in the fact that I have a very good relationship with her father. And she goes there every weekend. So there is no need for a substitute father, whereas other people I know, the father is just useless or they have pissed off. Or they see them irregularly. And there is real bad air between them.I think I am very lucky and in my experience pretty unusual.

*Everyone always says to me you are so unusual. Even the people I know who aren't single parents you know. They say that they hardly ever meet someone who says they have a good relationship with their father. **So in that way I think I am not really a single parent because he takes such an interest in her.** But I am and I am during the week, and I still am because her residency is here. But there is a lot of support there. And I just thank my lucky socks cos I look at the people and I don't think I am strong enough to cope. If I had had a really shitty partner who fucked off or who was an alcoholic like my father was. I understand why my mother didn't cope. And in that situation I wouldn't have coped."*(Sarah, 36, white working class woman)

Later on Sarah goes on to explain that there are many moments when she does feel that she 'can't cope' and at these times she struggles to approach her friends and daughter's father for support. She admits to feeling alone while appearing to have support, and finds it upsetting that her support needs go unrecognised by her friends. The actual experiences and ontological dimension of 'support' issues will be dealt with more thoroughly in a later chapter. For now, Sarah struggles with her sense of being a 'different' lone parent as she is not caring alone, but she feels unsupported at times. These alternative meanings are set out in more detail below. Assumptions abound here of the stereotypical lone mother who is unsupported and caring alone. This was rarely the case as these mothers were embedded in relationships and ties of mutual dependence and support. However, for Sarah, lone motherhood provides a source of identifying as legitimately in need of support. Living alone, for Sarah, represented a lack of support within the domestic setting. Within the domestic setting she had responsibility for caring and sustaining basic needs, while her daughter's father cared for their daughter every weekend in his home. It was in the sphere of the domestic that Sarah felt she had solo responsibility, although at regular weekly times her daughter would be absent. The presence of her daughter's father in the parenting of their daughter, led Sarah to wonder if she had a legitimate claim to support. Further because Sarah felt her circumstances differed from the stereotypical lone mother, she was unsure of her claims for support or welfare.

Janet also valued the support she received in the home from her ex-partner before the relationship ended. She valued her ex-partner being there although he clearly had a secondary domestic role in terms of housework or parenting:

"And he would be there to make the dinner and he would do the washing up before I came home if I was lucky. Otherwise, I would fly off the handle, why not? I did everything else. And um...er I had to take that kind of evening work. ...So I spent eight years with Phillip's dad. That was some financial security. He was a plasterer. It wasn't reliable work, in the winter he wouldn't have much work. And to be honest, my part-time work income was more of a stable income than his was. And he would be there. And problems with the children. If I got upset about something, the kids would have the father figure to bounce off." (Janet, 45, white working class woman)

In terms of living alone, Janet felt she had stayed in this relationship although she was unsatisfied because she did not want to live alone without an adult partner or live alone with her older son:

"It was nice to have that stability [in relation to living with her ex-partner]. He was there for the kids when I wasn't [due to evening work], even if he didn't look after them as well as I did. He was there and there was that stability in our lives and I could. There was somebody to plan with or if there was a problem with a child, you know like Ivan started getting older. You know, going through the teenage difficulties that you get and I would have him to talk to.

But when we split up... I put off splitting up with my second son's father for a couple of years because I really didn't want to live with my eldest son on my own because he was quite challenging at times. I mean he would never do anything to hurt me. He was just difficult, he did square up to me so he did look me in the eye and I did not want to go back to being a single parent again. I dreaded the thought of doing that."

H: "Why's that?"

J: *"Because it is lonely. Well, it was then. Sometimes when I was young I would spend weeks in that flat and no-one would knock on the door. If I wanted to make contact with anyone, I had to go out." (Janet, 45, working class woman)*

Janet felt anxious about feeling isolated living alone with her two sons. She was also concerned about her capacity to maintain her maternal authority in the absence of her partner 'being there'.

The four who were sharing accommodation did so for many reasons. These reasons could be separated into those who saw sharing with other adults or relations as a choice and those who felt compelled into this situation in the face of low income. Jan lived with her parents. Sarah and Amanda were house owners and rented a room to a lodger to increase their income in order to pay for

their mortgage costs. Kathleen was living with friends, which she had continued to do after she fell pregnant and preferred to continue to do so. I will now briefly illustrate some of these cases.

Jan was 32, had a four year old son and lived with her parents at the time of the interview. Jan was also a member of my social networks, and I was aware that later on in the research Jan moved out of her parents' home and had moved into a council flat after waiting several years for social housing and becoming pregnant in the context of a new partnership. Jan viewed herself as a 'lone mother' on the basis of being separated from her child's biological father and regularly attended a lone parent group. She also expressed a feeling of shared experience and interests with other lone mothers. Her sense of shared experience related to 'horrible partners' and 'not having a partner to share things with'.

Jan was 'on her own' in her view because she had left her ex-partner and was not receiving any financial or caring support from her ex-partner who was the father of her child. However, she also felt that really 'being on your own' as a mother constitutes 'living alone' with your children. The extract below illustrates how Jan is using these different meanings:

".. um I was with him, his Dad until he was nine months old and then we left. So I was not always on my own. I have only been on my own.. own, living on my own, for only a few months from when he was nine months to a year. And then I went home to my parents so I haven't really been on my own own for that long."

H: *" And how was it? Living on your own before going to your parents?"*

"Yer. It was really difficult actually. Financially it was hard. There was no way I would have done it without them.. I lent loads of money off them [my parents]. I got into big debt. Because I didn't know many people because my ex partner didn't let me know many people." (Jan, 32, white working class woman)

Living with her parents was a way of managing financially and receiving support from her parents. Jan had previously experienced debt and homelessness after leaving an abusive relationship. Her parents had provided some protection from this situation as she was able to move away from the town where her ex-partner lived. Jan portrayed 'living alone' as the norm for parents who had separated. It

was something she would 'have to do' at some point soon but living with her parents was 'easier'. The extract below is from a discussion about what to do when her ex-partner leaves prison in a few months' time, which illustrates the vulnerability, and fear that Jan lives with:

"I definitely want to get his passport out. One of his friends said he was thinking of kidnapping him... That is my biggest fear. I don't know, really when he comes out it is going to be really horrible, isn't it? I won't be able to relax and like he could be in the house one day you wouldn't know would you?"

It is going to be too late. Apparently you can disappear though. Because you can tell schools and they can register him in a different name. So if no-one ever checks his name will never come up. But then Xmas at home, he knows where my Mum and Dad live. He might watch the house there and see if I am there. You just don't know do you?.. er, I am starting to make friends now. Horrible man!! I want my Mum and Dad to move really, that would be easier." (Jan, 31, white working class lone mother)

She often positions herself as a daughter in this interview, which implies a notion of dependence on her parents. She viewed the input her parents provided to reducing her costs and caring duties as part of their parental obligations to her. For example, Jan discusses their role in her life and seems to be thinking through what had previously been a taken for granted reception of their support:

H: "In what other ways have your parents been supportive, so they help you out financially..?"

Um well yer. Well they have lent me money to sort the car out when that dies. Um, yer, they helped me move all my stuff out, I've got. Yer they have made a lot of allowances really. They have squashed a lot of their stuff, into like one spare room and we have got like two spare rooms. So yer, they do the shopping. I give him twenty pounds a week, that doesn't cover my food bill even really. I should give them more but they are parents aren't they?"

H: "Yer, is that for rent and everything, food as well?"

"Yer, there is no way it covers it. I should give them more really. I just can't afford it though. They never ask for more. He even doesn't like taking that. So. They look after him if I want to go out. When I first started going there ...[to job] when I did a bit of cleaning she looked after him everyday. And now I think ..Oh God how did I let her do that? Cos he is quite lively. She is the sort of person who would never say anything though. She would just look after him and get on with it. I'd find out from my Dad you know she has got a headache or stuff or she is really stressed but she would never say anything though. Cos my sister

was saying the other day that he was a terrible two year old and I was thinking no he wasn't I don't remember him being that. But then when you think about it she was really busy and he was crying all the time and he was really aggressive." (Jan, 31, white working class lone mother)

Her mother has particularly been a source of informal childcare so that Jan can undertake part-time casual work:

"Yer I wouldn't do it otherwise no way. Horrible work. It is not nice. So if he goes to bed late, you must stay up really late. I do it, that is another good thing about living at home. My mum will play with him. Otherwise you couldn't do it really. Cos he won't play on his own. He is now but not usually. Not long enough. God my parents actually do quite a lot really. I didn't realise. I will be living on my own one day, and they will be gone and I will think Oh No I can't cope Mum! It will be terrible really having him on my own. I am not used to it. It will be quite a shock really. God yer." (Jan, 31, white working class woman)

For Jan 'living on your own' is a prospect to fear and raises concerns about being able to 'cope' with the financial costs and lack of parental support. The meanings of 'being alone' that are presented in Jan's account refers to her class position and lack of financial resources to sustain lone residency. It is the increased vulnerability and responsibility placed on an individual when you live alone, and have a young child to care for, that is an overwhelming prospect rather than the more positive meaning of 'living alone' as a source of independence. This construction of living alone as a source of vulnerability makes sense in the light of Jan's experiences and material circumstances. It also fits with the cultural constructions of the couple family as more secure, and with parental duties to older children. However, when compared with Heather's, Patricia's or Kimberley's construction of living alone / living with parents, the difference in meaning and significance emerges. These mothers talk in similar ways about the way 'living away from your parents' signifies adulthood and independence. Heather remarks that when she had to move back in with her parents at the age of 26 (younger than Jan) she felt:

"Awful. I felt awful. There I was, 26, and living back at home with my parents. I felt like I had let myself down. I felt so ashamed." (Heather, 27, white middle class mother)

For Patricia living alone and having a home was a sign of respectability and satisfaction:

"Having a home is enough for me. I have a house, I have recently decorated. We may not have many luxuries.. we have playstation..things like that would have been luxuries when I was young. We have what we need." (Patricia, 34, white working class mother)

These meanings correlate with Patricia's and Heather's higher income positions in relation to Jan and an expectation / source of identity as independent adults. Jan's positioning of her maternal status as a lone mother, even though she acknowledges that her parents support her and she is not living alone, is because of the alternative meanings of lone mother as single adult, as separated from her child's father and receiving no paternal support or financial assistance. Further, her construction of her own legitimate and beneficial dependency on her parents is in contrast to her view of living alone as 'lonely and hard work'. She doubted her capacity to cope.

Lucinda was uncertain about living alone. She was also uncertain about leaving her partner and separating her daughter from her father. However, she realised she could cope with living alone:

"I used to..he used to literally do nothing in the house. I looked after her on my own full-time, and in the evening I did all my housework. And that is what I do now, so it doesn't look different. Um..I used to be scared and I used to think, because I never lived on my own, I used to think - Oh God I won't be able to handle all the money..but it is easy. When you get down to it, it is no different from doing a weekly shop and working how much money you have got to buy. Um, its better because there is not that tension all the time. When you are waiting for someone to get in. It can ruin your whole day, you know. I think me and Janet have got so much closer. We always were close, but I think when it is just you and I don't know about two children so much, but when it is just you and your one child you are close. C o s t h e r e i s n o - o n e e l s e." (Lucinda, 27, white working class woman)

Lucinda thought living alone would be risky in more fundamental ways than it was (perhaps due to the pervasive nature of the social problem / social deviance discourses). However, in practice it was the continuity of mothering alone that was a fundamental part of this experience.

Living alone was associated with risk for some of the other women. Several of the women, especially those living in 'rougher' areas, were concerned about their safety as women living alone. For example, Kimberley expresses satisfaction in mothering alone and being single / separated from her children's father – she finds these aspects of lone motherhood express her independent nature. However, she is anxious about living alone:

"One thing that did change that I kind of got used to over the years anyway, was being on my own at night. I can stand on my own two feet financially, I do all my own decorating, I have just built a sandpit in the back garden three bricks high. Put edging and stone on it. In the last holiday, I laid half a patio, decorated four bedrooms, redone my bathroom, and built a sandpit you know, it is like, I don't. I got that from my Mum, watching her. She did everything herself as well. It's a bit like men might do it a little bit better and they might agree to do but if I want something done I want it done now. You know, get up get on with it and get it done. See the results and think, God I did that! I get about on my own. I have my own car, do you know what I mean? Yer, but being on my own at night, I hate it!"

H: *"What don't you like about it?"*

"I just feel vulnerable. You know, all day it's alright. The kids are running around. It's like there is something about being in the house on my own..anyone could walk in.."(Kimberley, 27, white working class woman)

The significance of the different dimensions of lone motherhood can be varied. Kimberley is expressing a multiple social positioning as independent while also vulnerable.

Amanda and Kathleen also positioned themselves as 'lone mothers' although they were sharing accommodation with others. This was because they had the main caring responsibility for their children. However, both saw many advantages to sharing with other adults that helped them to escape a situation of lack of support in domestic home based labour. For Kathleen, sharing with friends was a way of preventing her 'feeling a lone' within the private sphere of the home. Amanda also saw sharing her accommodation with a lodger as a way of escaping the restrictions of living alone with dependent children. Her lodger offers additional income as well as a live in babysitter.

So although the majority of the sample placed themselves in the category of lone mother, some had experiences that constructed the meaning of living alone as unobtainable, risky or beneficial. Some were unable to form lone parent households while others preferred not to form a lone mother household. Being a lone mother household can be a status many women find it hard to achieve because of a lack of resources, while others prefer not to become lone mother households as 'living alone' is evaluated as restrictive. And then for others such as Kathleen, being a 'household unit' was not considered an essential element of being a 'family'. These meanings were embedded in experiences and positioning of agency in relation to a capacity to cope with living alone. They also served claims for support and rights in terms of the need for support if caring for children alone in the home, or the right to live alone with your children. Justine expressed her preference for non-cohabiting relationships as a live in partner may risk her maternal authority in making the decisions about child-caring:

"I think I am better off bringing up my children my way. Until they are old enough to make their own way. I am not willing to settle down with anyone else again. Casual boyfriend that will do. Kiss at the doorstep and then bye!!... I don't want to share my life with anyone and ask is it all right if I go and study? Or spend this money. Or sorry I have over spent again. Or the conflict with the children." (Justine, 27, white working class woman)

I have already touched upon some of the other senses of 'being alone'. For example, as separation from the biological father, as related to the degree of connection to others or support in undertaking family responsibilities. I will now review these other dimensions of 'lone' motherhood. I will then go on to illustrate the consequences of the many meanings and allude to the underlying conditions that reinforce such meanings that will be further developed in later chapters. A major consequence can be seen as the tensions and contradictions of 'being alone', when it can be evaluated simultaneously as a risk and an empowering social condition, which could relate to the current social conditions where women negotiate risks, changing expectations towards individuality and vulnerabilities.

Being alone as separated from the biological father:

I set out earlier how Sarah's account illustrated an understanding of lone motherhood beginning once a mother separates from the biological father of their child. This was also a more wider definition marking family change. Kimberley felt that once she had separated from her ex-partner she was a 'proper' lone mother although she had *felt* alone in her responsibilities for her children:

"Well, I didn't become a single parent until February of this year when he moved out but basically you know ..it was a very kind of separated relationship, if you know what I mean."(Kimberley 27, white working class mother)

Katlin also described her account of lone motherhood from her separation from her partner. However, Katlin distanced herself from lone motherhood as significant to her maternal identity. Katlin presented herself as a 'normal' mother rather than a 'lone mother'. Katlin feels like a normal mother as 'she does the same things [any other mother] does'. She, however, does not feel like she is mothering alone as her mother and her child's father regularly look after the children on a weekly basis. However, for now it is clear that a 'lone mother' to Katlin is one that has separated from a partner and is an adult living alone with children:

H: *"What do you think of the term lone parent and do you think it applies to you?"*

"Well, it obviously applies to me because I am by myself. It is just one of those things that being by myself, I just take for granted, so I really don't see myself as different to anybody else. ..You know, it's... I don't know. Lone parent just sounds really grim. For start the term lone. Oh ..it is not that dire really. I quite enjoy it to be honest.

Um. I don't know...If it comes up I just refer to myself as a single parent. I don't get funny about it. If somebody wants to refer to me as a lone parent, you know what they mean. I don't like to get hung up on labels and things. Really it is not important. I suppose some people tend to see, like, I say it is normal to me but with friends, I was talking to a friend yesterday and she was saying she had been talking to another friend saying - Oh Katlin copes really well being a single parent. I said - that is just what you do and I am no different to you really. I don't see it that way. I split up from the children's father when I was pregnant with David. So Laura was..I mean I was only just pregnant with him. And Laura was about two, just two when we split up so it was really you know she is eight

now. So that's all I've known, it's quite a normal thing." (Katlin, 27, white working class woman)

There was then another set of meanings around 'mothering alone' where participants asserted that they felt 'alone' prior to the event of parental separation. These meanings relate to the degree of chosen or forced responsibility these women felt they undertook as mothers for their children as well as the extent to which they felt immersed in social relations of support.

Being alone as mothering alone:

This set of meanings referred to the extent to which a mother was caring and providing for her children's needs alone. Meanings of mothering alone could again provide a source of identity that displayed independence and choice, or displayed a lack of choice and a distribution of power / support / resources that was allocated through the actions of others. A further process of distancing oneself from the situation of mothering alone acknowledged the role others played in caring and providing for children.

One example of mothering alone as a negative, the outcome of a lack of choice revolved around the absence of 'good fathering'. This meaning of being alone emphasises the absence of a father or 'good fathering' in a lone mother family.

Kirsty's account was forged within this set of meanings of mothering alone as being a source of vulnerability because her child's father was absent and not involved in family life. Kirsty's route into lone motherhood was one she saw as resulting from abandonment and betrayal on the part of her baby's father. She had met her partner and established a relationship which ended once Kirsty fell pregnant. At this point she also found out that her partner, who was from Kenya, was married and left to return to Kenya. Kirsty had not 'chosen' to be a mother or to mother alone and this time was viewed as a time of crisis in her life. She had difficulty securing housing and suffered from ill-health once the baby was born. Kirsty describes 'being alone' as a primary condition leading to her ill-health and a major source of anxiety and vulnerability. For example, Kirsty discusses the onset of post-natal depression:

"Yes.. partly because it sort of struck me. It struck me and I became really depressed and panicky and you know.. I had to go into a mother and baby unit. And I think it was the fact that I felt sooo very on my own. Although I had some very nice friends, at the end of the day you are left on your own in the house, at the end of the day it is your ultimate responsibility with no family backup you know." (Kirsty, 42, white middle class woman).

Kirsty explains that she ideally wanted a child under conditions whereby she was cohabiting with a supportive partner. The extracts below illustrate her predicament:

"Some people who suffer from agoraphobia never seem to get over it. I thought, When am I going to get over this? This was not what I wanted. None of this was what I wanted. None of this was how I wanted to be on my own. I had all the worry about money, about everything and no.." (Kirsty, 42, white middle class woman)

Kirsty often remarked on her sense of vulnerability from 'being alone' and unsupported by her child's father:

"I feel very vulnerable because I am on my own and I feel like I have a lot of responsibility, financially and in all sorts of lots of other ways." (Kirsty, 42, white middle class woman)

For Kirsty being unsupported in your caring role as a mother was something that was wrong and indicates a lack of responsibility on the part of the father. Meeting children's needs did not sit easily with mothering alone as there was the absence of the essential father figure and source of support. In the context of Kirsty's traditional upbringing, scarce resources and lack of choice in becoming a mother, these meanings make much sense.

Kimberley and Janet also felt unsupported and 'alone' in their caring role. Kimberley's account involved more of an assertion that she was able to cope with the solo responsibility for caring for children and she developed the more positive sense of being alone as an expression of independence and self-reliance. However, she also felt that paternal lack of involvement in the daily tasks of

child-rearing led to her 'mothering alone' which she generalised as a predicament for many women:

"I mean, I don't see anything as a major chore really to be honest but I don't think.... I feel the others miss out as well, because there isn't a man around. Like punishing Martin if he has done something that I would say is bad then I would have to stop him from having treats. If the treat that day is to go swimming then to be able to punish Mark, in a way that he knows I mean what I say, the other three can't go swimming. So you know, that kind of sense, if you did have a man who would be able to keep that one home and not let the others miss out. Cos that starts a whole new friction then with the kids. It is because of you we can't go swimming, and that causes a major argument. And I think a firm man's hand with the boys as well makes a difference. I am quite firm with them anyway, I don't know if all people's opinions are the same but I think a firm man behind them. Obviously, someone who is doing good for them. Not bad. I don't agree with having someone there just to give them discipline but you know battering a life at the same time, do you know what I mean? I mean it in a good sense.

A lot of things are hard but you learn. Us women cope too well don't we? We are copers and we say, Oh never mind. I will get up tomorrow and it will be alright. I suppose if we have the kids we haven't got a lot of choice really have we" (Kimberley, 27, White working class woman)

The boundaries of women's solo responsibility for children has limitations according to Kimberley. Kimberley sees the father as having a role in supporting a mother in terms of being available to be with the children during the day and in providing authority and discipline. For now the point is that although Kimberley feels able to cope with mothering 'alone' in the sense of being the main carer for her children, she sees the lack of father involvement as detrimental to her children's development and as increasing the demands on her. Claims as a lone mother for Kimberley simultaneously provided an expression of her identity as an independent woman but also raised concerns about children's needs and her support needs.

Janet offered a powerful portrayal of paternal absence in lone mother headed families in the extract given in the methodology chapter. She felt strongly that lone mothers were overburdened with too much responsibility for children and that men were fleeing their family responsibilities. She saw this lack of paternal involvement as a risk to children, increasing poverty and as a restriction to mother's ability to undertake other activities as well as child-rearing.

Janet is constructing a powerful image of 'lone mother' as a universal condition of unsupported motherhood and paternal absence. This image of 'lone mother' as unsupported by fathers was a common view of 'being alone' as a mother so that many of the women asserted that they were 'alone' as a mother within their previous relationships with their children's father.

Kimberley, Geeta and Lucinda as well as many others, all felt that they had the majority of the responsibility and domestic labour prior to parental separation. For example Kimberley talks about having a 'separated' kind of relationship:

"It was a very kind of separated relationship, if you know what I mean."

H: *"Did you not live together?"*

"Yer, we did live together but for the last five years of our relationship he slept on the sofa. It didn't bother me in the slightest, it didn't bother him. That was just sort of. I used to go out with my friends, he went out with his friends and um. So when people say how do you manage being a single parent? when you have got four and your boys stay up and blar blar? when you are used to relying on somebody, I didn't find it like that because I never did rely on him."

H: *"Did he not have much involvement?"*

"No obviously when I had Mark, he was great but by the time I had Kevin, my third, he was not around much. For the sake of having someone around and we were each others baby sitters." (Kimberley, 27, white working class woman).

Although Kimberley suggested she wasn't too happy with 'not being able to rely' on her children's father for support, she also felt men were ultimately only suited to certain parental tasks while women were more able to cope with the everyday tasks associated with child-rearing, as we saw in an earlier extract.

Lucinda's account also demonstrates this sense of a lack of paternal involvement in child-rearing. She describes her everyday life as a lone mother as similar to her everyday life as a couple parent:

H: *"So how has your life been different on your own? Has it been different?"*

"It has, it is not so very different because he works full-time and then he used to go out to the pub. So I was on my own anyway. So .."

H: *"In terms of doing everything?"*

"I used to..he used to literally do nothing in the house. I looked after her on my own full-time, and in the evening I did all my housework. And that is what I do now, so it doesn't look different." (Lucinda, 30, white working class woman)

Being 'alone' as a mother with little paternal involvement was part of becoming a mother and being responsible for children:

H: *"So how did you find having a baby? What changes did that make to your life?"*

"um..um..I found it very, I found it very hard. I think the biggest change is that you are not on your own, and you have got someone to look after constantly. I can't really explain it very well, but the fact that it is not just you, you have got someone that is your responsibility and it is all the time." (Lucinda, 30, white working class woman)

Another sense that a mother was alone when the father was absent was with a lack of financial resources and the loss of the provider in the family. Cath felt alone in caring for her children and in providing the material resources necessary to sustain family life:

H: *"What kind of involvement would you have liked from their father?"*

"Well, help basically. Help.. men seem to think they can have these children and then just get up and go!!! I was left holding the baby..in all this .. and to me a child is expensive and as they get older, it gets worse, I believe because they want the label this and that. When they are that age (points to my daughter) you can put anything on them. But I was getting letters from the CSA, is it? they wanted the name of the father and all right I have given them the name but it doesn't benefit me and they claim all they can stop is a pound if they are on the dole." (Cath, 39, Afro-Caribbean black working class woman).

'Lone mother' is a totally gendered category and it is also highly classed. There was a general expectation and association of lone motherhood with an experience of poverty. Tamara talked about being terrified of this 'poverty'. She had left her husband because he was abusive to her and her young son. However, her marriage had afforded her a wealthy lifestyle. Her own background was 'middle

class' and she had married a husband whom she described as 'well off'. Tamara described the challenges in attempting to leave her husband as she feared living in poverty and not being able to cope with lone motherhood.

H: *"Can you remember what kind of things you were frightened about?"*

"Oh God. Um..Being on my own. But it was weird I was frightened about being on my own although I was on my own in my marriage because he never helped me. um.I ..and money. I was very secure in terms of money wise secure. Not emotionally ..although I did have everything. I had a lot of money, a big house and a cleaning lady and a membership to a sports club and everything. It was lovely." (Tamara, 34, white middle class mother)

The constructions of mothering alone as involving a lack of support from fathers positioned these mothers as victims and overburdened. The implicit discourse of the necessity of fathers to family life was clearly apparent.

Kathleen provides an illuminative example of mothering alone understood in non-problematic ways, contrasting with Tamara's understandings:

H: *"So do you consider yourself a single parent?"*

"Yer absolutely. "

H: *"And how long have you been a single parent?"*

"Since day 1. I had a relationship with a friend, and then I moved to college here. And um didn't know I was pregnant and then found out about six weeks later."

H: *"Right so you had started college had you?"*

"yer. So it was all sort of slightly...And everyone said 'Why don't you have an abortion?'. But I didn't feel like I needed to. It wasn't an option. It wasn't something I thought about. I just became pregnant so I thought I would get on with it. So I think in a way it was ..I don't know what the word is but because you know you are on your own, you just got on with it." (Kathleen, 26, white middle class woman)

Patricia perceives the social image of mothering alone in an alternative way. In her account, Patricia describes how her social networks are mainly married women. Perhaps due to this Patricia describes other 'peoples' views as positive

about the freedom single mothers have in comparison to married mothers – freedom that is from men:

H: “ So how have you found it being.. ”

“being a single parent?...It’s very hard. I think everybody has this image of single parents – Oh aren’t you lucky, you don’t know how lucky you are, you have no-one to argue with. You have got no-one to ..well everyone thinks you are very self-sufficient..it’s not through choice. It is a case of having to be. It is a necessity rather than choice. The problem is everybody thinks that the grass is greener. My friends with partners, look enviously and say, Oh you cope, I could cope, and I think you are in for a big shock because it is not what you think, it is just I happen to be able to cope with it because I am who I am. I think it is other people’s envy that always make me laugh, because people are just so silly, they don’t see what they have got, they just want what other people have got. They see it as freedom, they don’t see it as totally binding, total commitment.”
(Patricia, 34, white working class woman)

Patricia strongly suggests a degree of choice in terms of her partnerships, but an inescapable responsibility when it comes to her son. A range of discourses exist across accounts that do seem to converge around Duncan and Edwards’ conception of lone motherhood as a social problem or as an escape from patriarchy. However, the meaning women draw is one embedded in their social contexts and social networks. Patricia is stressing the way that mothering alone is intensive mothering placed solely on her shoulder. However, her friends represent her status as a single woman liberated from a cohabiting relationship with a male partner as a beneficial aspect of lone motherhood.

Being Alone as Being Unsupported by Others:

Feeling you are ‘mothering alone’ was also related to a lack of support from others as well as from fathers. This wasn’t always the case as we have seen in the case of Kimberley, as well as others, such as Tamara and Jan, who were supported by others but still placed themselves within the category of ‘lone mother’ because the father wasn’t involved in family life or because they had separated from the father. With these in mind, being ‘alone’ was often intimately connected to ‘feeling unsupported’ in general.

Janet again offers a strong portrait of this position. She felt unsupported and discriminated against on many fronts as a lone mother. Janet felt strongly that lone mothers were unfairly treated by men, employers and government to the extent that they were forced to take solo responsibility for their children which was inescapable. Within this account a clear narrative of the isolated and unsupported lone mother can be clearly seen. As well as having to take on paternal responsibilities for children, employers and the Government fail to support mothers:

"But being a single parent is hard and not respected enough. And employers need to understand that the support mechanisms are not there. When a single parent gets home. That single parent has the job of two people to do. There isn't someone else there to do the washing up, to do the washing. To make sure the kid's school uniform is ready for the next day. To make sure that they are doing their homework.

And the government has just gone off in two completely different avenues as far as single parents are concerned. They want single parents to go out to work, which is literally forcing them out to work. There is no choice on whether you can stay at home and look after your children. I am very cross with the Labour party with that one." (Janet, 45, white working class woman)

She further adds:

"And single parents, the stress involved is just unbelievable. If people have got young children they should be supported in being a young parent. Supported in being a good parent.... The nurturing years are the most important years in somebody's life. You know and the politicians know this, there is enough psychology reports written on the behaviour of people when they grow up. Being a parent, and being a single parent is harder than it is for anybody else. There are people who manage but it we are very unsupported. And support is important." (Janet, 45, white working class woman)

Janet is expressing values as well as a discourse of rights for mothers to be more widely supported. Janet has had two spells as a lone mother. She felt that during the 1980's there was more financial support from welfare agencies for lone mothers than today:

"If I needed a clothing grant, and I very rarely applied for those things, cos I was proud of coping, not one to ask my parents for a loan or anything like that. I really did learn how to, it was very hard but I am the kind of person who likes to cope. I won't break, I won't fall down. I won't let everybody see that I am not

copied. I found it easier with Ed, my first one. It was so much harder the second time around. I knew it was going to be hard. It was hard to cope financially..."

H: *"So there was the clothing grant?"*

"Yes. And if I needed a cooker, my cooker was condemned, then social security would allow me a certain amount of money and I could look around. And they would give me a cheque. And I could go and look. And that would be a lump sum payment. and um you know I could get a new cooker. Whereas nowadays if you want now you have to take out a loan and you have to pay it back weekly. If they make an overpayment to you then you have to take it out and you have to pay it back weekly. And to be honest you don't get enough to live off weekly. Full stop now. There is no leeway, they don't give you the opportunity to cope. They force you into a corner where you are not coping. And it doesn't surprise me in the least that they would be so much fraud around with single parents these days." (Janet, 45, white working class lone mother)

What seems striking in Janet's account as well as others is the extent to which she feels forced to take on the solo responsibilities for child rearing and feels unsupported and unrecognised as a mother. The beginning of this quote also illustrates the dilemma of mothering alone in the face of discourses of 'good' mothering, as well as attempting to cope while also feeling unsupported. Janet is asserting her dependence on others and needs for support to enable her to cope.

Under a different set of social conditions and with a different biographical trajectory, Rasheene also presented this image of the lone mother as alone and unsupported in everyday family tasks and responsibilities. Rasheene is an Asian woman who has escaped domestic violence. Previously, she lived with her husband, her four children and her husband's brother. Her social relations and immediate neighbourhood was greatly organised around her family relations. With her parents living next door and other relatives living in the same street, she was greatly tied to the power relations within her family and community. Her mother carried out the daily task of looking after her children while she worked to earn money which was passed straight to her husband. When she left her husband and her local community, she 'had to' go into hiding from all Asian communities because of the shame and blame women suffer when they leave their husbands. Within this narrative, Rasheene related her lack of support and isolation to 'being alone'. She describes her circumstances:

"I haven't got a life of my own. I am thinking, Oh God I am just back in prison again. It is like just being at home. I have got no family, no friends.I am so stressed out about that. There is no-one to talk to. No friends who will support me. I have the home start. But she is like working now, and I haven't seen or heard from her for a while. ...my neighbour complained to the social services when I went out to the shop and left the kids....I said, if one's asleep on the sofa, one's in bed and others doing homework. I can't get them all to come out and drag them to the shop. I can't stand there arguing with them for twenty minutes, I might as well just run down there and get it myself. But they don't seem to understand that I have no-one." (Rasheene, 25, Asian working class woman)

Rasheene feels she may be better off returning to her husband because she feels unable to raise her children alone and wants to see her family and friends:

"It is just so difficult. And bills and everything else. I just can't cope sometimes I'll just go back. Its only me getting the abuse, and the kids are happy and I don't have to think about bills or anything. You know. The people who are helping me now say don't do it but you know I am so isolated I don't know what to do."

H: "So what kind of help would you like?"

"Um just to have a life of my own. Just for someone to be there and just to help me, look after them for a while. Sometimes I feel I can't cope and it is just to look after them for a while. It is so difficult. I just need to get out. And, you know, sometimes I think I will just walk out and not come back. I just want someone to be there for me. To help look after them. To just let me have some time. That's when I think I was better off at home you know. I had friends there who could visit. Even if I wasn't allowed, they'd come ...I am totally alone, isolated.." (Rasheene, 25, Asian working class woman).

With this construction of 'alone' as isolated and unsupported some of the participants then distanced their experiences from this norm. For example Justine talks about being part of a collective, which describes her experience of developing a social network based at the local family centre:

"Lone ...The word lone has different meanings doesn't it. To loan means you are going to borrow it for a time. You might be a single parent and you don't always want to be. I tend to think to myself I am one of many of I can get into a group where there is others in the same situation as me. Where we have got a common bond and problems. We can either talk about them over tea and coffee, and cigarettes and what not. Or we can sit and discuss them and do something about them." (Justine, 30, white working class mother)

Katlin also describes being more 'alone' in this sense with her partner than she is now as a lone mother separated from her partner:

"I felt like that when I was with him to be honest. It was just me and Laura in the day. And I was isolated, we were living outside of Otterworth, near Bigville in a town. On the top of a hill. It was dire, it was horrible. So you know I did feel really isolated there so you know. And he was out all day, so I was doing all of it by myself then. And it was harder then having to cope with another adult. With him, in a bad relationship, than it is now."

H: "Right.."

"Well I felt taken for granted. You know a lot of things I would ask him to do just round the house. I don't know I suppose I kind of felt like being entertained when he got home. I had been alone with her all day and hardly seeing anybody. That's a little unfair maybe. And I expected a bit of attention from him which I didn't really get so coming away and finally got this place. And David was born a couple of months after I moved in although it was really weird being alone in the house by myself. And in that position with a new baby and everything, you know I just did everything the way I wanted to and I built up my own circle of friends and different acquaintances now. And different things I do now. I didn't have then. So I feel less isolated now than I did when I was living with someone." (Katlin, 27, white middle class woman)

Being alone as independence and autonomy:

An alternative set of meanings around being alone revolved around a more powerful evaluation of mothering alone as an expression of agency and choice as an independent mother, responsible mother and 'good' mother. Equally these categories related to a construction of a self-responsible independent subject as adult and agent. These meanings were more prominent among participants who valued their support networks, felt financially secure enough, who had fewer children and who had been lone mothers for longer.

Compared with an abusive marriage where Susan experienced hidden poverty although her husband was wealthy, living alone, mothering alone and securing welfare benefits increased her autonomy and resources:

H: *"So the main changes of coming out of that marriage and becoming a single parent, were they in terms of you becoming more independent?"*

"I was my own boss. I could look after the children the way I wanted to. I could spend the money the way I wanted to. I had never had so much money. I had never had so much money."

H: *"Really, was that being on benefits?"*

"Yes, being on benefits. It was absolutely amazing!! Because if he wanted to give me £30 a week housekeeping, that is all I get. He had my child allowance as well. That was why about a year ago they were going to pay child benefit to a man weren't they? I got so cross about that. So many women rely on that money solely." (Susan, 38, white working class woman)

Amanda goes as far as talking about 'a new culture of lone motherhood' where gender identities are formed more around notions of separateness and connectedness; independence / dependence. What is significant here is the shift Amanda is commenting on which evaluates being single and independent as a mother / woman as a more socially acceptable condition although she still questions her ability to cope:

H: *"Can you remember having any concerns about that before you were on your own?"*

"I had lots of concerns about it before and after it happened. I am also aware that twenty years ago I wouldn't have done it. Absolutely no way!! I probably would have struggled on. You don't have to nowadays. I was concerned because I grew up in a sort of a Catholic family and my Mum and Dad are still together and I wasn't sure how that was going to affect their development being separated from their Dad. As it goes, they see him very often and we have a good relationship and I wasn't ever concerned about his capacity to be a father. It wasn't to do with them - it was to do with me. And I was concerned about that, being selfish. Putting myself first but at the same time I believed it was possible, I believed in modern families, people having a lot more space than before and that sort of thing and staying friends. So I was concerned about how it would affect the boys, I was concerned if I was going to go crazy. From never having any time off or having very little time off!! But those were my two concerns." (Amanda, 32, white middle class woman)

Patricia, Melissa and Kimberley also position their self identity as 'independent'. Kimberley felt independent in the sense of feeling able to cope alone with the daily tasks of mothering without 'asking for help'. She presented her biography as structured by a core self that was highly independent. This could have been shaped by childhood where her mother was separated from her father, lived alone and mothered alone. Kimberley looked after her younger sister 'rather than go to

school, that was the choice for me'. However, Kimberley also reported feeling well supported by her mother and sister now, who looked after her children on a regular basis.

Patricia also valued her autonomy in making decisions, and describes how others perceive her as a responsible mother. She also comments on how, at other times she would value sharing decisions with someone:

"I don't know I am probably..I don't know..I don't know if I am different from most single parents. I don't know that I know that many single mothers, um, like to say I am stronger or weaker. I know I am stronger than most of the married people I know. Or the people in relationships. They come to me with their problems you know because I seem to have got it sussed you know. There are bits of it that are actually quite good. And I suppose, not arguing with somebody is actually quite good. Making the decisions can be an advantage or ..It's a double-edged sword really. Sometimes you need it, sometimes you don't. You don't need it all the time." (Patricia, 34, white working class woman)

Sarah also felt that others' image of her as an independent and strong 'woman' was at odds with her own sense of her vulnerability.

These issues can be illustrated by exploring the tensions in Melissa's account. Melissa initially describes 'choosing' to leave her partner because she felt she could look after her daughter independently without her partner's help. Then Melissa ends her account by saying that she feels 'solo' responsibility for children is 'impossible' to cope with and not in her child's interest. Melissa seems tied in to simultaneously defending the virtues of lone motherhood for herself as a woman and for her daughter while also asserting both of their needs for a more shared sense of family responsibility and division of labour. This account also brings together the way the alternative meanings of being alone - as unsupported and as having solo responsibility - are significant in representing her experiences. Melissa is drawing on oppositional discourses around lone motherhood as accentuating women's independence while also increasing their load of the division of labour in social reproduction in unjust ways.

Melissa asserts a strong sense of agency and personal desire / ability to be 'in control' of her life as a woman:

"So I was in a relationship and I wasn't happy so that is not me. So I had to remove that. Remove that first. And I am slowly just chipping off all the things that have become a habit and become attached to me so that I can actually get down to my real self. You know. I suppose some people may have said you are mad you could have stayed you know. You have security, he was working, you had a place to live and all that sort of stuff but (sigh) in terms of my happiness and my sanity I choose to go that lonely road and walked out with two suitcases and you know. (Yep) And whatever else I came with." (Melissa, 28, Afro-Caribbean working class woman)

She feels marriage in particular can be risky for women's 'freedom':

"I think I use the term single mum when I know I need support. I am a single Mum! Come and help me you know. Life in general, you know. Well no. ... Sometimes I go into homes of let's say friends that aren't single, they have a family there. And I am not envious at all! You know!! I don't envy you actually!! Its like phew. In terms of for a woman to have freedom over her body, her mind, her spirit. I just see it bye bye someone else. And I don't think that should happen if you are in a relationship or not. You know, you should still be able to go for your goals and class yourself as being a ...a...happy confident individual. Don't let anybody not anybody try and stop you or step in your way. And stuff like that you know expectations of people in relationships. Well, I work so you cook, all that sort of stuff. If you want to cook do it. I better stay in and cook dinner some of my friends say. If you want to go out do it. I can see how frustrated some of them become sometimes. As in why, you already have a young child to look after so why, he may be bringing in the bread but um it is always open for communication. It is just so closed, sealed and boxed. You know (Um)...You here and I am here. This is your job and this is my job. Um..

*Excuse me people say I am insane..well..I am quite happy the way it is. If that is what you call sane, and your whole spirit is gone in your eyes. There is no shine left. Um..you are old before your time you know. And urr, maybe I am really not the marriage type and maybe I won't ever be but I am quite happy. **Having my own life, my own set of rules and values, and you know.** You think I can't take care of myself, watch this space you know. I can show you a way of doing it that doesn't necessarily mean a way of giving up you know a part of you because you have that wedding ring on your finger. I may have strong views on that...(sighs)." (Melissa, 28, Afro-Caribbean working class woman) (Emphasis added)*

It is independence from men that Melissa ultimately values which is shaped by her own biography as well as possibly by her cultural location although I failed to further probe her on her cultural values in the research interview in an appropriate way. This was a common theme in about a quarter of the research sample. Even when Melissa was in a relationship with a man, she wanted to be

'independent' and viewed herself as a lone mother because her daughter was her responsibility and she didn't want another man taking 'over':

"That is my views. I mean single don't mean nothing to me. I mean I can be in a relationship with somebody. I have had relationships since you know I split up with Lynn's Dad. But I always in my head said I'm single single, because Lynn is my responsibility. You can come along for the ride. You can be here if you want to be here, this is for the partners. If you are happy being here then sure. I really don't mind but you will be damned if I am changing one little bit." (Melissa, 28, Afro-Caribbean middle class woman)

So being independent as a mother and a woman was tied up with Melissa's sense of her ability and status as a 'expert' mother, and her gender identity as challenging women's dependence on men. Being a lone mother enabled her to feel like she had control over her life and to assert her authority. However, as Melissas reflects on how her circumstances have changed and she has taken on a higher education course, she admits to changing her thinking about 'being independent' because it was a barrier to securing resources of support. Melissa says:

"It is experience, you learn by your mistakes you know. And um...I think it is all a mistake trying to do it all on your own."

H: *"As in looking after children or as in doing the course and looking after children."*

"The whole thing, doing it all by yourself. My big mistake is mistaking that I could do it all by myself. And um... there has been times when I have just thought why doesn't somebody help me!!!! Whether I need any help or is it just um...or do I need to change. Do I need to change? Do I need to sit down and think hey, what is the rush? Why are you so hell bent on just steering this course which is only going to accomplish you know running yourself down to the bone. So I have taken six months off my course."

H: *"And that's OK is it, can you take that up again?"*

"Yea, ..because you know the housing situation, I don't know where I am staying at the moment, with all that going on just thinking about work. So um.. I have used this period to see what areas I can improve in. My family are here, Michael's here, although it is whenever he can offer me something. He is, Lynn is your niece. She is your niece after all. You know why not have her more often."

I have been saying that to Lynn's Dad and even if trying to pursue him again to have her more often, it would never have been possible in Stanworth because I can't ring him up and say come on...and so I had to be back here. So I am using this opportunity to chase up those things that will enable me to get through this course at the end of this day." (Melissa, 27, Afro-Caribbean middle class woman)

This extract, in my view, illustrates the clash of these meanings of 'being alone' and the oppositional discourses of lone motherhood. The context dependent nature of achieving an independent mother identity is also a matter highlighted here. As Melissa's circumstances changed, she re-evaluated her values and meanings. The contradiction between independence in the face of responsibility for others and the labour of caring was stark.

Being alone as being single:

There was another meaning associated with lone motherhood that described a partnership status, again through absence as single. Being single, again, could be experienced as a stigmatised status or source of individuality. For example, Mandy was aware of being single:

"So there I was with Hilary at home with this sort of, I am the black sheep of the family, You know. No bloke is going to want you now sort of thing because you are soiled."

H: "Oh .."

"Yer, it was pretty nasty really. Yer, hated me, loved Hilary." (Mandy, 34, white working class woman)

In fact this aspect of lone motherhood was one of the most undesirable aspects. Being single was considered a source of unhappiness and loneliness. It symbolised a perception of a lack of intimate relations in the mothers' lives. Meeting a partner was also considered difficult as it was difficult to socialise in adult only worlds.

Some of the women did, however, see benefits in 'being single'. Trisha gains intimacy from her relationships with her children. She would prefer to stay

single as she has a close relationship with her children as a lone mother – living alone and mothering alone with them:

"Yer. It is better. From my point of view. I don't really want to get involved with somebody else because it would come between me and the kids. Cos I think we are really close. I know they fight and I know they annoy me and I know I hate kids but I don't think I would like if someone would get between us. I mean it is, Justin is fifteen now and he doesn't want to do things with us as much. He wants to be off and away more. Oh no, stay with me.

We have been going on holiday and things. But I don't think next year he wants to come with us. He's my baby. He wants to join the army. I am thinking that's fine he can join the army but I'll miss him. I don't want him to go in. We went through so much together. So it is like different with us. He has always been the one I can talk to, he's grown up a lot quicker than what he should have done. He's the only one, like if Arthur or Chris go and stay with anywhere, it doesn't bother me. But if Justin doesn't come home I can't sleep, I really miss him. It is because he has always been there as the one I can talk to." (Trisha, 38, white working class woman)

Patricia, while recognising being single is not her preferred choice, describes how she has no 'problem' with it. This partly relates to her belief in her competence to meet her children's needs while mothering alone:

"If a child ...I believe a child is better off with one parent who loves you to bits. And is going to make that kid feel happy in a secure environment. Than two parents that are at each others' throats and destroying each other...and the child. I have seen it around and my mother gave me that sense of security in my own childhood, so I am very lucky. I know what to give my child. It is not a major problem. That is probably why I didn't have such a major problem with us splitting up. But um...it is very personal and I am sure all different people have given you different reasons. I don't choose to be single. That is the way it has happened. I am not saying I will always be single but twelve years down the line I still am." (Patricia, 34, white working class woman)

Sarah's and Katlin's children stayed with their father each weekend. This enabled them to have a single lifestyle as Katlin explains below. Both of these women felt weekend contact was 'unique' among lone mother households. They also described a process of negotiating separate identities and participating in adult only social worlds at the weekends. Katlin describes being between exclusive social worlds as a single adult at the weekends and a mother with children during the week:

"Yer all my female friends have a partner and children. Yer, that is a bit of a change. That was one thing I found really hard to get used to when I had Laura. Your social life completely changes. You know, and now the only person I will see on a regular basis and like go out with on the weekend is my sister well she is single. Everyone else has got their little families. My children go to their father's at the weekend which is wonderful. So I have Saturdays all to myself and Saturday nights. But everyone else wants to be with their children obviously. So even though I do see them occasionally at weekend. Regularly it is only my sister that. I find that hard, not being able to go out. And people having other commitments because mine are gone at the weekend." (Katlin, 27, white working class woman)

Sarah describes the implications of this process as feeling like she has a split personality:

"You know, the other major thing which is really important for me, I don't know if anybody else has said this to you. I feel like I am schizophrenic, I feel like I have a split personality. I almost feel like I haven't got a child at the weekend. She goes away, I go out with my mates, I dress up, I get drunk, I have a laugh, I am single and I have got no cares. And then the weekend she is here I go to the zoo, I go round to my friends for tea. I don't drink alcohol. I don't go out. I love it. I do like having both lives but it is really difficult because I have different sets of friends some people who don't know the me. If they meet me when I am being Mummy. ..But that is quite a specific thing that I have really got into and I find it really difficult to balance sometimes. I feel like I am almost a superficial me and then a real me. When I am with Annabel that is who I am. And it is difficult to integrate those two things." (Sarah, 32, white middle class woman)

These women feel more alone when they are not with their children. Mothering alone, living alone and being single can provide different sources of identity and hold different meanings.

Conclusion:

The many ways that these women represented the category of 'lone mother' and positioned their identities and experiences in relation to these constructions demonstrates the varied nature of subjective experiences. There did appear to be some drawing on, and acknowledgement of, broader social and cultural understandings of lone motherhood that did map onto Duncan and Edwards' (1999) and Fox Harding's (1993) discussions of discourses of lone motherhood. However, the very definition of lone motherhood needs specifying so that these discourses can be viewed as public narratives around meanings of living alone, mothering alone, parental separation and being single. Within each of these

aspects of family life (which derive from the socially constructed nature of our understandings of what family constitutes) discourses ranged along the lines of foregrounding deviance / risk, innocence / injustice, autonomy and choice and alternative gendered identities to traditional gender roles.

Discourses were drawn on and produced in a context dependent fashion as they resonated with experiences. Understandings of lone motherhood then shifted somewhat within accounts and between accounts. A particularly problematic position was in the situation of aspirations for 'independence' in the light of scarce resources and mothering alone. These meanings and discourses also expressed positions of agency, identity and welfare claims. These could also shift with context as the meanings then changed as an alternative discourse was drawn on. Presenting different understandings around lone motherhood performed certain social tasks and processes. Concern with deviancy 'spoke' to the listener about morals and norms. Concern about support, raised issues of needs and dependencies. Concern about autonomy made claims to independence and distancing from support / needs issues.

These issues will be revisited in the context of negotiating caring and paid work in later chapters. The next chapter presents an overview of the participants' journeys into living alone, mothering alone, being single and parental separation. Taking this step back aims to provide the reader with an overall sense of the data set and to explore some of the interconnections between agency, identity and social structures that became apparent in these accounts of family change.

Chapter Four

Becoming a Lone Mother: Journeys of Change and Continuity

Introduction:

In this chapter, I am concerned with illustrating the ways in which accounts of becoming a lone mother demonstrate some of the complex inter-connections between values, agency – power positionings and resources. Taking note of these inter-connections challenge some of the prominent representations of routes into lone motherhood in research and social policy. For example, in Chapter 1, some of the ‘causes’ of divorced, separated or single never married lone motherhood were theorised as based on the following causal factors and directions of influence:

- ◆ Alternative family values/ feminist separatism —→ action;
- ◆ Lack of resources —→ action.

However, in these accounts there was a complex interplay between action, resources, and values. A number of these factors shaped the agency / power positioning that the respondents presented. When all these factors reinforced each other to provide a clear guideline and realisation for action (such as stay with a partner or end a relationship), a course of action could be negotiated. However, many of these factors compounded each other so that the play between material resources / values and agency was complex and involved much negotiation and some uncertainty / risk about the course of action to be taken.

There were also varied routes into forming a lone mother household, mothering alone, being single or separation. In this study the main routes into lone motherhood were:

- lone motherhood due to the separation of a married couple;
- lone motherhood due to the separation of a cohabiting couple who weren't married;

- lone motherhood as first time motherhood to a single woman;
- And lone motherhood due to unexpected abandonment or death of a partner / the biological father.

The majority of accounts represented the first two routes into lone motherhood which can be commonly described as relationship breakdown involving co-residency. Table 4.1 illustrates that 35 of the 43 participants became a lone mother household due to the separation of a cohabiting union. The dominance of relationship breakdown and parental separation as the main route into lone motherhood is in line with national figures which suggest the majority of lone mothers are either separated or divorced from marriage or cohabiting partnerships.

The second route into lone motherhood is when a mother finds herself mothering alone from the outset. This route into lone motherhood could be due to parental separation prior to the birth of a child as a mother and father reassess their relationship in the context of parental responsibilities and family commitment . This route could also be due to unexpected pregnancy while single or not in a partnership. However, although these different reasons for lone motherhood as first time motherhood have some bearing on the process of change - the stories share a similar trajectory and concerns of adjusting to first time motherhood as well as lone motherhood. The final set of stories highlight unexpected loss of a partner and indicate a sudden time of crisis and loss in the adaptation to lone motherhood. The different stories also indicate the nature of mothers' concern for children - in the first and last scenarios children were seen as also having to cope with change and loss.

Table 4.1 Routes into lone motherhood (counting their current status first and then previous spells of lone motherhood):

Marital status	Route into lone motherhood	Number of participants
Divorced	Break-up of married cohabiting couple	11
Separated	Break-up of married cohabiting couple	3
Never married	Break up of non-married cohabitating couple	20
Never married	Break-up of non-married and non-cohabitating partnership post pregnancy	2
Never-married	Relationship break-up before child's birth	2
Never-married	Falling pregnant while single	1
Widowed	Death of a spouse or partner	3
Number who had been lone mothers previously - Spells of lone motherhood:		6

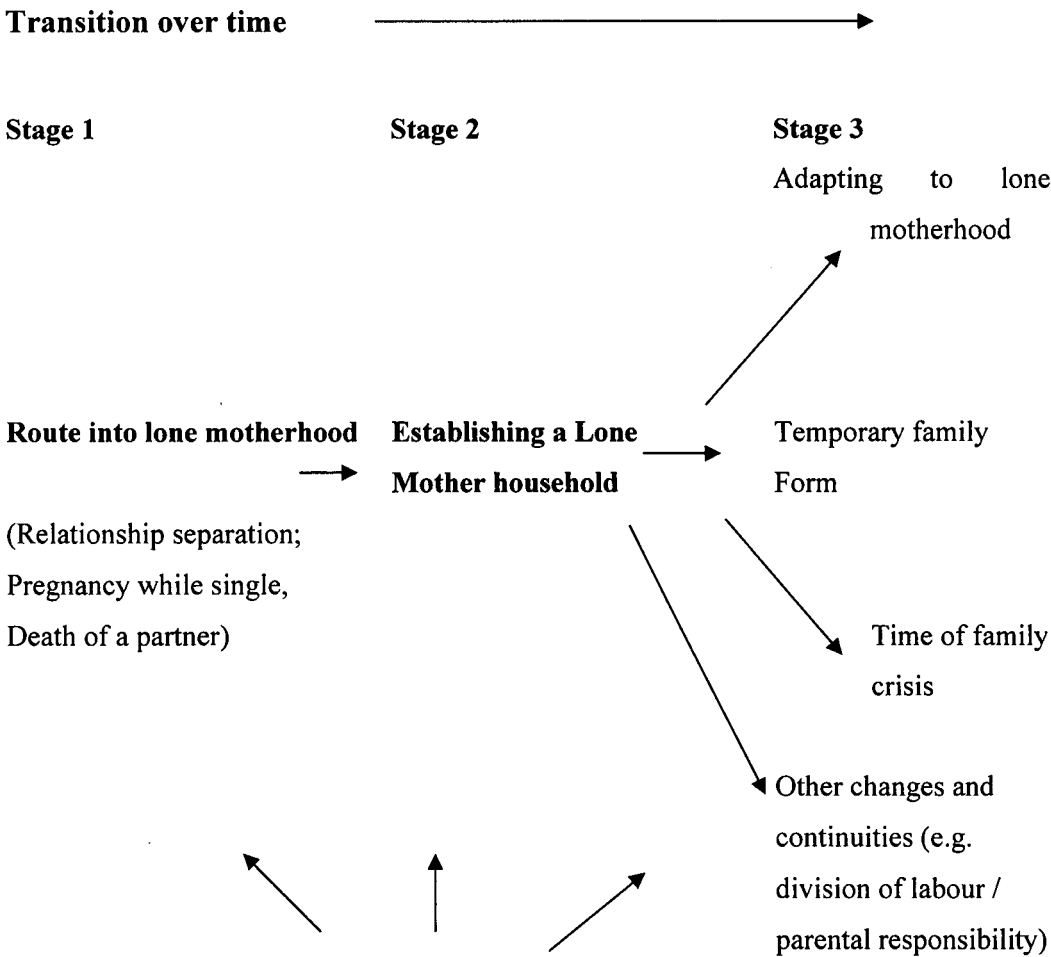
Table 4.1 illustrates that the majority of lone mothers in this sample were separated from their cohabiting partners after the birth of their children. 34 of the participants can be included in this group. Their accounts share a similar set of stages and concerns about family change involving a separation and / or renegotiation of residency, partnership and parenting. A much smaller proportion of the sample separated pre-birth of their child during pregnancy (4), were single by choice at the outset of motherhood (1) or were widows (3). Overall, thirty of the women maintained contact with their child’s father who also contributed to parenting in some way.

Another overall claim that will be presented in this chapter is that the process of family change that becoming a lone mother involved (in the sense of living alone, becoming single, separation or mothering alone), was a source of renegotiating one's sense of self / agency and maternal / gendered identity. The experience of adapting to lone motherhood and *experiencing* change, led to a reassessment of values, positioning in relation to normative guidelines and identity. For example, many of the women presented 'living alone' or 'mothering alone' as a source of anxiety, difference and deviance prior to parental separation. However, after a period of adaption, which could be viewed as akin to biographical disruption for some of the mothers, they found new meanings in their experiences and located themselves in different ways in relation to norms, coping and desirable maternal identities. Women's experiences as well as their meanings, resources and values can be transformative and have a dynamic shifting relationship with each other.

In the details of each account, there is much diversity and particularity. There are also the dimensions of specificity in terms of whether a respondent is referring to lone motherhood in the sense of living alone, feeling alone, mothering alone, separation or being single. In the commentary below I will first consider the process of becoming a lone mother household (separation and living alone definitions) and then investigate the relationship between forming a lone parent household and mothering alone / feeling alone / being single. Although there is much scope for diversity, at the level of *conceptually thinking* about these accounts, some discernible sources of social structures and facilitators of action emerge which lead to aspects of change and continuity within accounts of becoming a lone mother. Further, some identifiable sources of influence can also be separated out. Before I examine some case studies to explore the detail of accounts, I will offer an overview of conceptualising the process and facilitators of change / continuity in becoming a lone mother household. The diagram overleaf captures these dimensions of subjective experiences. Although these stages are not neat linear stages but reconstructed phases in a story of transition, there were three significant phases of action and change highlighted in personal narratives of becoming a lone mother. Stage 1 focuses on what was assessed as the cause of relationship breakdown - this is generally multifaceted. Stage 2

relates to the action taken to live apart and the description of the separation of residency and partnership. When a mother with children does separate from a cohabiting partner - what are the resources and consequences involved? Stage 3 relates to the current picture offered as the result and significance of relationship separation, at the time of the interview.

Figure 4.1: Aspects of routes into lone motherhood and factors facilitating change / sustaining continuities:



Factors negotiated that have a dynamic relationship to each other and social action:

- ◆ **Values;**
- ◆ **Agency / power / identity positioning to others;**
- ◆ **Resources;**

The process of becoming a lone mother household represents a time of change in these women's lives. However, that process is neither clear-cut, linear, composed of a clear beginning and end or caused by one factor. The model above attempts to capture some of the diversity of the process while demonstrating the kinds of contingent outcomes (which are then likely to form part of the ongoing nature of change in social life) and the kinds of contingent factors. These outcomes and transitions were discernible from the interview transcripts once these were viewed as holistic narratives.

Firstly, accounts presented a story of how a mother came to the situation where she was either living alone, mothering alone, separated or single. These revolved around justifications and accounts to explain the absence of the father, either in the household, as a partner or in the family in a broader sense (for example absent as a relationship). Here accounts have been categorised as involving relationship separation which could be from a married, cohabitating or a non-cohabiting relationship. I did spend much time in the analysis phase examining in detail the differences and issues involved in each of these journeys into lone motherhood. However, for the purpose of this chapter I will focus on the issues prompting relationship separation rather than provide an account of the difference marital status / cohabitation / non-cohabitation makes, although general issues are raised. Secondly, another route into lone motherhood was through getting pregnant while single, following this pregnancy through to full-term and taking on the role of mother. The third route into lone motherhood was through the death of a spouse. Around two thirds of this data set cluster around the first route into lone motherhood.

The middle section of the model describes the event of forming a lone mother household, while the third section considers the way this process could lead to change in the sense of the subject position constructed and framed in the interview account. Change operated in the sense of ontological and categorical change, as a mother found new meanings and identities in becoming a lone mother household for her sense of self / meanings associated with lone motherhood. Or change could involve an increased sense of vulnerability and risks in family relations. A third option was to view living alone, or being single

/ mothering alone as a temporary family form, which a mother expected to escape from soon. All participants displayed the fluidity of each subject position with shifts occurring frequently between positions. It doesn't take much for a lone mother to move from affirming her ability to cope with lone motherhood to claiming vulnerabilities. And family life continues to change as a mother may repartner, experience housing insecurity and so on. Each of these stages involved negotiating between values, agency / power positions and resources. For example, there were contingencies in accessing the resources to establish a lone mother household to move to stage 2. The implications of this process and identifications with the category of lone mother for social policy is this - different identifications indicate different positions in relation to a lone mother's sense of agency. (Further, I will go on to argue in the later chapters that positioning oneself as an agent as a mother may not lead to positioning oneself as an agent in relation to partnerships or paid work). So this analysis of lone motherhood can throw light on debates around how women's multiple identities and sources of agency relate to one another in the context of social policy debates about women's role in the labour market. Another overall issue relevant to social debates is that experiences of lone motherhood are complex and contingent as well as subject to change. Identifying the role of values, normative guidelines, relationships, power structures and resources can go some way to explaining the process of fluidity and change.

This process will now be explored in more detail. The discussion has been organised under the following headings to highlight the factors that women themselves identified as the main issues involved in their negotiations and decision making processes in acting to leave a partner / follow through a pregnancy while single / respond to widowhood. These were the factors highlighted in women's accounts of their experiences and actions (although I must say that some were explicitly stated, such as the first three, while the latter emerges more squarely from my characterisations of the issues):

- ◆ Sources of domination;
- ◆ Normative guidelines and values;

- ◆ Resources;
- ◆ Identity/ agency / power positionings.

Sources of domination:

This section highlights the ways the mothers positioned their agency as greatly constrained by processes of power involving domination, manipulation and subordination. I am bringing these terms of reference to an understanding of the ways that power can flow through relations between people. There are problems in using these terms in the general ways I am presenting them here as these processes can require detailed analysis and explanation (for example in some discourse analytical approaches). However, escaping a position of domination was a matter for many of the women, especially the 13 that experienced forms of domestic violence. Many centred processes of domination as the factor leading to their relationship separation.

The cases involving disclosures of domestic violence are particularly illustrative of these issues of physical domination although economic inequalities between partners were also a significant factor. An alarming number of participants, around a third of the sample, had been the victim of domestic violence or left their partners because they felt their behaviour was controlling, abusive or oppressive towards themselves and their children. Participants reported many difficulties in leaving an abusive partner such as a high degree of fear for their safety and their child/ren's safety as well as a lack of access to independent financial resources, social isolation, anxieties about lone motherhood / children's needs and the fear of coping with singledom with children. The latter aspects will be dealt with below under consideration of normative guidelines / values and resources.

Trisha presents a narrative based on the problem within her marriage due to her husband's violent nature. She positions herself as the innocent victim of his pathological violence. Her husband's violent nature is pathologised as caused by his upbringing. Trisha describes her husband in the following extract, associating his behaviour with his criminal family connections:

"I was with my ex-husband for about nearly seven years but a lot of that time he was in prison anyway. Cos he was done for aggravated robberies. Things like that. And he was really violent. He was Irish, with six more brothers and, gods know, how many uncles and cousins scattered everywhere!!!! And they were all alcoholics. All I know.. it's his parents ...and they come over when they were all little and we reckoned, that his dad, had done something dodgy because he had this nickname, and when he died and we went through his papers, his name was actually the other way round. So when he moved to England he had changed his name. I reckon the whole family was dodgy!!!" (Trisha, 37, white working class mother).

With her husband in prison 'a lot of the time anyway', Trisha may have found this marriage bearable. The way Trisha uses language here suggests her husband's absences were a relief although we may wonder why she didn't leave him at these times. Trisha had expressed her wish for him to leave and to end the marriage, which she describes in the following extract:

"I had said to him, I have finished, I don't want anything more to do with you. And we had separated but he wouldn't move out. And we had gone through, on my side, in a divorce but we couldn't take it any further because he was still living in my house. Even though the council had given him a flat, he wouldn't get out." (Trisha, 37, white working class mother).

Trisha seems to have felt trapped in this relationship. She already lived in social housing and couldn't claim for a relocation as she did not want to disclose the violence (an issue discussed later as involving normative guidelines of privacy in the family). Her husband's local family networks acted as a form of surveillance. She felt unable to end her marriage, leave her husband or face her husband in a court due to the impossibility of protecting herself against her husband and his relatives, even if the police also protected her:

H: *"That must have been really difficult.. what happened in moving out?"*

"Yea, we came to Otterworth because me Mum and sister was down here. But otherwise I don't know where we would have gone!! If they had all still been in Lesterfield, then I don't know where we would have gone. I wouldn't have stayed in Lesterfield. Cos there was no way I could have left him and not been looking over my shoulder all the time. Cos I had his brothers and uncles and cousins. Cos there was so many of them." (Trisha, 37, white working class mother)

Trisha, therefore is unable to make her husband leave, unable to secure housing to leave herself, unable to prevent the violent episodes and unable to protect herself or her children. She consistently highlights the impossibility of asserting herself in relation to her husband because of his physical dominance, his unwillingness to leave her, and her own lack of material resources. Further, when her husband was absent, the problem of violence was too.

Trisha emphasises the degree of 'real' violence she and her children experienced compared with some other women's experiences - which again serves to represent Trisha as a real victim. Below Trisha compares her experiences with others who fled to a women's refuge:

H: *"What was that like?" (the women's refuge)*

"It was really good because it was there when we needed it, so it was good. We had a few problems when we were in there because I wouldn't let anyone near the kids. Other kids ..if they went near them, I would just go mental. And, I got into sooo many arguments with the mothers....Well, the ones [the mothers] that we had the problems with.. I don't think they'd actually been in a proper bad environment. I think it was the case that the mum and dad had had an argument and the mum had left him. Whereas with ours I was getting battered, Justin was getting battered, and Arthur was two days old and he got slapped in the face cos he wouldn't stop crying. And that was what made me decide that we had to start trying to move out. But it took over a year to get away." (Trisha, 37, white working class woman).

Eventually Trisha was able to leave her husband but unfortunately this occurred within the context of a violent episode where the police intervened (after an earlier failed intervention) and arrested her husband.

Jan portrays her ex-partner as a domineering character. She describes 'having to do' domestic labour for her partner and his son, as well as look after their newborn baby. She also describes acts of violence and the threat of kidnapping their son as ways that her partner would prevent her from leaving. The extract below provides an example of Jan's portrayal of her ex-partner:

H: *"So you had your young baby and you were looking after your partner's son too?"*

"God yer. He used to work, I'd. He'd stay downstairs all night watching telly which was good, I didn't mind that. He'd sleep in my bed all night and then, Liam would wake me up at five or seven in the morning and say 'get his child out of bed and get him ready for school!' This was even a few months after he was born and I had been up all night feeding him. I had to get his sandwiches. And I would have to take him to school and then I would come back and tidy up and stuff and take any phone calls and make his breakfast. He was a nightmare. It was never good enough either. He would always end up shouting at you or something. Then I would go out shopping for the rest of the day. Hang around the toilets because I had nothing else to do just to avoid him. I would stay out till about six o'clock. And it was winter so it was really cold. This was in the Midlands. Then I stayed on my own and got into debt. And then I came to live with Mum here." (Jan, 32, white working class mother).

Jan suffered being strangled and beaten at the hands of her ex-partner. She had attempted to leave on several occasions but her ex-partner would physically hold their newborn son whom she feared leaving. With few financial resources and social networks, Jan did her best to avoid her partner by staying out of the house all day and wandering round her local town. Jan also described the ways her partner would attempt to control, for example, by threatening her, holding their son or restricting her friendships / activities.

Danni, Mary, Lucinda and Justine felt their 'age' increased their vulnerability to abusive relationships. Marilyn, now 36 with three teenage children, was in a cohabiting relationship from the age of 16 to 27, in which she had three children. She describes her relationship as involving emotional abuse and physical violence. The process of leaving this relationship was 'terrifying' as it was 'all she knew'. Danni, who is now 24 with a three year old daughter, described how her partner would 'put all their friends against her' and how she sought his approval. Lucinda, now 32 with a 7 year old daughter, felt her ex-partnership had involved emotional abuse where her partner bullied her. She was 16 when she started this relationship and she noted that 'normally you wouldn't stay that long with your first love'. Justine, now in her late 20's with three children, described feeling uncertain about what was acceptable in a relationship as an explanation for her previous experiences of abuse.

Tamara and Sue were in a position of economic affluence due to their marriages. This was not necessarily only due to their husband's wealth, both of the women had previously been in professional / managerial occupations. However, both

had also given up these occupations to raise children full-time thus losing their independent source of income. Tamara suffered violent episodes from her husband which their two year old son witnessed. Sue describes her routine experiences of violence:

"I got up fed up being his punch bag!! ...We had a huge three hundred year property with 7 acres, a load of goats, chickens..we grew our own vegetables. And I did everything. My husband would basically work all week and come home at weekends..he got on with his drugs and that was it basically!! Then, he would smash everything up..and then start on me. That was basically the routine!" (Sue, 40, white middle class woman).

Rasheene offers an account of more collective patriarchal domination rather than the individualised notions of domination that the other respondents presented. As an Asian woman in her early 20's, Rasheene had fled domestic violence and the actions of her family who wanted her to return to her husband. Rasheene had an arranged marriage at the age of 16, and worked at the local supermarket to earn money that went into her father's bank account. Her earnings were to contribute to husband's financial resources so that he could travel to England from Pakistan. Her husband did come to live in England, and they formed a household (the house was owned by her father and her parents lived next door). After a few years she had three children. When her oldest daughter was eight, Rasheene fled to the police as she wanted to be relocated due to domestic violence. Her family have repeatedly denounced her claims of violence and attempted to find her and bring her back to her husband. Rasheene now has her children with her but she feels constantly under fear of her the local Asian community or her family finding out where she is.

Normative guidelines and values:

As well as power flowing through these physical and manipulative expressions of dominance, many of the women held values that sought to do 'the proper thing' in a relationship / as a mother. These acted as guidelines for actions to stay with a partner or leave, and often there was a contradiction and negotiation around conflicting values and moral dilemmas with no clear pathway of action. Notions of 'good mother', 'good wife' and 'good partner' figure highly in these accounts. For example, attempting to do the proper thing in terms of caring for

children was often understood as meeting their children's needs. The powerful and pervasive nature of a discourse of children's needs has often been recognised in the sociological literature around motherhood (Lawler 2000; Ribbens McCarthy, Gillies and Edwards 2000; Smart and Neale 1999). The moral imperative to meet children's needs was, however, balanced against capacities and resources. Some were also uncertain if meeting children's needs meant staying with a partner or leaving.

For Mertha, in the extract given in the methodology chapter, once she discovered that her husband had been abusing their daughters for seven years she acted promptly, according to her account, to leave her husband. Once her children informed her of the abuse, she acted as to secure their safety. This obligation and responsibility towards her children prompted her to not follow her preferred course of action which was to physically harm her husband:

H: *"Did he confess or anything?"*

"To me? Yer, well I kind of trapped him because I am like that!! I got a couple of my work mates to come over, basically to stop me from killing him actually!!! Then I actually worked as a bouncer part time and I was in a quite a state, and I thought to myself if I do anything, because you can and you feel like it.... I had to sit on my hands all the way through. But I kept thinking to myself, well if you do anything stupid then you will be in an awful lot of trouble. And then who is there for them [the children] then??? Life is bad enough you know, for them!! (Mertha, 34 white working class woman)

Geeta also left her abusive husband soon after her daughter was born. Having a child marked a particular turning point in life. At this point Geeta recalls wanting to leave her husband. Geeta felt her husband's behaviour was a threat to her daughter:

"We are both very happy about being on our own. I am far happier the two of us on our own than staying with my husband. He was abusive. It wouldn't have been right for Penny. I would have stayed in a marriage, she would have seen her mother knocked about and constantly put down. She would have ended living in fear of her Dad." (Geeta, 43, white working class woman).

Geeta managed to leave her husband through the help of her GP in the first few months of her daughter's life.

For Tamara, Sue and Trisha concern about their children's safety was negotiated against what they felt were severe constraints in leaving violent partners. Tamara wanted to wait till her two young sons were older as she felt unable to cope alone with them. Sue felt that staying with her husband was appropriate action as a 'good wife and mother'. The moral imperative to meet her children's needs revolved around her understanding of being a 'perfect mother' which involved providing decent housing, intensive mothering and the rural countryside location of their home (she described earlier). This conclusion can be read from Sue's accounts of why she stayed with her abusive husband:

"I thought I was doing the best staying because of the children. They have got the security, the nice house, the wealth. They had start-rite shoes. Nice clothes. ...I think I over-stretched myself trying to be the perfect mum."

H: *"What was the 'perfect' mum?"*

"Everything had to be spotless. All homemade bread and dinners. And then making sure the children went out for their walk everyday. To make sure they I made their clothes and their fish fingers. I used to make everything... I milked the goats, ran the playgroup, I did quite a lot really." (Sue, 40, white middle class woman).

It was not until her children requested they leave that Sue left her husband:

"I thought I was doing the best, they had security and then one day, Nina said, we have got to get a life. I said 'Ok', so we did!" (Sue, 40, white middle class woman).

Sue and her two daughters then left in the middle of the night with the help of the police and welfare agencies. Trisha had wanted to leave 'for the kids' but one attempt to involve the police led to a further violent episode as her ex-husband found out. Trying to meet her children's needs for safety was a year long process for her.

In accounts of becoming a lone mother where violence was not disclosed and separation was due to dissatisfaction with the relationship, values around maintaining a couple headed family and children's wellbeing were complex to work out. Sarah and Lucinda were concerned that living alone, parental separation and mothering alone were risky for their children's wellbeing. Both

reported having experienced trauma themselves as children with separated parents. As we saw in the earlier chapter, Sarah felt her own childhood was unsatisfactory due to the absence of her father in family life and her mother's difficulties in coping. She feared her daughter would have a similar unsatisfactory childhood.

Lucinda had also experienced her parents' divorce. For her it was the degree of unresolved conflict between parents and absence of her father during her teenage years that were a source of painful experiences. Lucinda was concerned about placing her own daughter at risk of such painful experiences:

"I know what it is like to miss a parent. I had it with my parents. Sometimes she [my daughter] says I was lucky because I got to live with my Dad until I was 16, but I say yer, and the arguments" (Lucinda, 27, white working class woman)

When Lucinda considered the implications for a child's wellbeing in relation to living with parents who argued and did not get on, she also felt that the proper thing to do was to leave:

"I also used to think very bad about splitting up. People would say, Oh the children, the effect it has on them. I know it does because my mum and dad was divorced. But it got to the stage where I thought, this is forming her idea about what marriage is, what family life is, and it was shit!! I don't want her thinking that that is how it is when you have a bloke. That they go out drinking, and they come in and go, and where is my bloody dinner!" (Lucinda, 27, white working class woman)

Kirsty had fallen pregnant while in a relationship. However, later on during her pregnancy, her partner left her quite suddenly. It later transpired that her partner was actually involved in another relationship. Kirsty decided to have her child, but suffered post-natal depression and difficulties in coping as a lone mother in the early years of her daughter's life. She described her conviction that she had always expected to parent in a heterosexual partnership:

"I was on my own. I never thought I would be on my own. You know, I had the responsibility for everything. If there was a partner there, he could have reassured me of lots of things. If there had been somebody there, even if they

were out at work, um during the day.. it was the night-time that was the worse.”
(Kirsty, 43, white middle class woman)

Kirsty had to negotiate a normative guideline (couple parenting is more supportive and desirable for children) in the context of a lack of choice in becoming a lone mother.

Normative guidelines of ‘doing what is best for your child’ and ‘putting your child’s needs first’ could also propose two contradictory courses of action – to separate from the father or to stay in a couple headed family. This was more pronounced in accounts whereby a mother had taken the decision to leave. Hence, values needed to be worked out and they were done so according to the context of the quality of the family relationships and the extent of risk. Two further examples offered another sense of this negotiation of the normative guidelines around good mothering and children’s needs. Hazel and Rasheene both considered moving back in with their abusive partners because they felt children needed ‘good parenting’ and ‘to be with their mother’. Hazel’s account stressed the latter. Hazel had hospitalised herself after struggling with what she perceived as mental illness which she describes as depression prompted by her abusive relationship and childhood experiences. This meant that Hazel lived apart from her children for a few months while in hospital and then for further year and a half as she lived alone in rented accommodation. During this period she maintain contact with her five children. At one point three of her children moved in with her but she felt they were suffering from the separation from their other siblings. She then returned them to their father. She recalls being at the point where she missed them sorely and felt that her absence was threatening their welfare, that she was considering moving back in with her ex-partner and attempting to rebuild the relationship. Sadly, Hazel did move back in and suffered another violent episode. Again she left but this time with the children. Hazel describes her dilemma and concerns about her children’s needs:

“Cos they was with him [after she left]. Because I..I left them to come to Otterworth. And I was in hospital for six weeks and at the end of that I was going to stay here. And he decided not to let me have them. Yea. (Gosh). Then we decided we could split two each. Have two and two and we did that for a while.

The boys started fighting among themselves so I sent them back. Cos it wasn't between them and they needed to grow up together and so I sent them back."

H: *"That must have been tough."*

"Yea, that was tough. But it just sent me right over the edge. I had to send them back for their sake. But then...that is what I did. I never envisaged that I would be without them. Never." (Hazel, 34, Afro-Caribbean working class woman)

Rasheene offers another example of negotiating a normative guideline as contradictory courses of action were indicated. Rasheene did not actually place herself as the 'right' person to care for her children. In her Asian family (which Rasheene described as typical of Pakistani Asian families), her mother had looked after the children while she went out to work, earning money which went into her husband's / father's bank accounts. Rasheene felt as if she was a 'poor' mother, as she was inexperienced in looking after her children and unaware of their needs. She also struggled financially to provide for her four children on Income Support. Her children were also keen to see their father, who gave them presents if Rasheene visited her parents (which she would only do if a friend went with her). For these reason, as well as her isolation and loneliness away from friends and other family members, she thought she would return to her husband because at least the children will be cared for and provided for.

Susan provides an example of becoming a lone mother through leaving an unsatisfactory relationship that did not involve violence or abuse. Susan made a connection between her own happiness and her ability to be a good mother. Susan drew on a discourse of rights to happiness and to exit unsatisfactory relationships (this relationship was not marked by violence but by the demise of intimacy and closeness) along with normative guidelines about putting the children first. Susan describes her reasons for leaving her husband:

"I accidentally got pregnant with Karl. And knew that if I didn't get out of the relationship then that I would be there for a couple of years yet and I was getting depressed. I was so so so depressed, I couldn't hardly cope with the kids I have got. So I thought no, better get up and go." (Susan, 42, white middle class mother)

Susan develops the narrative of her previous relationship where she later adds that she had her first child five years earlier in an attempt to improve the relationship:

H: "So you had been 'trying different things?'"

"For about 13 years!! No after about seven or eight I thought, hang on, you know. What will make a difference? Well, let's have a kid and see if that will make a difference. I knew I wanted kids but he wasn't so fussed. He said 'well let's give it a try'. You don't know until you try. But it didn't work, he wasn't really into them." (Susan, 42, white middle class mother).

Susan goes on to position her ex-partner as a 'disinterested father' as well as painting a picture of her locality at this time as unsuitable for children's needs (she lived near a motorway and on the outskirts of one of Britain's largest cities with no car). This example further reveals the role of the normative guideline to meet children's needs as well as the presence of discourses of rights to individual happiness / to leave an unsatisfactory relationship for a woman. The discourse of rights overall was a less prominent one in comparison to a focus on children's needs.

There were also a number of implicit normative guidelines and sets of values structuring these accounts of becoming a lone mother. I will focus here on the family as 'private' and desirability of heterosexual coupledness. The privatisation of relationship / family matters was extensive in these accounts. By this I am referring to the boundaries that were placed around what is viewed as a public issue and a private issue and the work that these women did to maintain their experiences as private. In Sue's, Tamara's, Trisha's and Danni's accounts, they described their experiences as 'hidden'. Sue and Trisha had not wanted to tell friends or family about their abusive relationships. For Trisha, this would have been a sign of not coping. She describes going 'against everything' and calling the police. Not only was turning to the police a source of shame and failure, it was highly risky in the context of her fears for her safety. Sue hid her experiences from her friends and family which she felt able to do as the violence occurred in the spatially segregated context of their home.

Another normative guideline referred to the desirability of coupledness as well as expectations that couples can depend on each other, especially if they have children together as the moral imperative to take up your responsibilities came into play. The desirability for coupledness emerged in around thirty nine of the accounts in one form or another. In the overwhelming majority of the accounts, the women stated a preference for a partnership over singledness.

This closed off possibilities for leaving a partnership as a woman thought she could not cope alone. For Mertha as we saw earlier, being married also led to an obligation to have children. However, this desire for coupledness was mainly contingent on the quality of the relationship. The normative guideline was negotiated in the context of a relationship. Three of the women who had been 'left' by their partners attempted to 'keep the family together' and experienced loss. For example, Elizabeth describes her experiences:

"I was really scared about how I was going to handle the baby and everything. And I was really hurt. I tried desperately to try and keep the family together. And things like how are you going to explain it to the baby that the father walked out? To make it more complicated he got this other woman pregnant so, how do I explain that to her? that he chose this other baby instead." (Elizabeth, 31, white working class mother)

These issues of normative guidelines meant that a hierarchy of family values can be identified. This hierarchy of values took note of context and was negotiated. So while couple headed families and coupledness were desired and recognised as the most desirable basis for family life, mothering alone / parental separation / living alone was preferable to poor couple parenting. Patricia stresses this point when she referred to 'one good parent being better than two bad ones', which was a common sentiment.

Resources:

Resources could refer to financial, housing, supportive networks or welfare support. The role of resources were crucial in facilitating mothers' agency to leave an unsatisfactory partnership and form a lone mother household.

Tamara, Trisha and Sue as well as others, were aided by the police and legal system in leaving their husbands and gaining maintenance. Welfare agencies provided many with necessary housing and benefits. Many of the women also experienced an increase in their incomes and economic resources once they were eligible for welfare benefits. For example, Sue, Geeta and Lucinda said they appreciated the reliable income that welfare support offered them compared to the economic dependence they had experienced with their ex-partners. Sue remarks on this new found source of independent income:

"It was fantastic, I absolutely loved it [after I left my husband] I had money in my pocket for a change. The children were happy and I was able to get income support" (Sue, 42, white middle class woman)

Lucinda thought she would be worse off once she separated from her ex-partner but was surprised to realise that she was 'better off and it was like running a weekly budget' which she had done with half the level of income in the past.

However, difficulty in accessing welfare support, especially housing, had prevented many of the women from leaving their partners. Lucinda as well as ten other women, had attempted many times to claim for housing but did not want to disclose details of her partnership. For this reason and due to lack of resources to borrow money for a deposit on rented property she was unable to leave for a considerable amount of time. Justine and Trisha had 'nowhere to go' after living short-term in a women's refuge. They indicated their lack of resources as reasons for falling into another spell of unsatisfactory 'shotgun' partnerships where they soon cohabited. Both had met their next partners while staying at the refuge, when they were in the local area. Both soon realised their new partner was unsuitable and felt they had limited options.

Health professionals were also a source of help but again they could act as facilitators or barriers to leaving an unsatisfactory partnership. Geeta describes her departure from her husband (note the lack of income due to managing to save 50p for the phone call):

"I had a counsellor. We were living in Durborn. I managed to keep 50p for the phone call and I phoned my solicitor too. I explained I wanted out. So I went to see the counsellor on Monday and she said you are not going back. And so I left with what I had on and a changing bag with my daughter's things in. So we walked out and never went back." (Geeta, 43, white working class woman).

Rasheene on the other hand, faked illnesses to get out of the house and attempt to escape her husband but found her GP less willing to help.

Family and friends could also be sources of help or reinforce normative guidelines / values that cautioned against parental separation. For Geeta, Tamara, Jan, Estelle and many others, family and friends supported them in providing temporary accommodation, money, gifts, emotional support and caring support. However, for others such as those who felt unable to turn to their family or friends, or who received advice to stay in an unsatisfactory relationship, these resources were more complex to negotiate. Mandy felt torn when she had to go against her friends' advice to 'honour her marriage' and lost friends as a consequence. The issue of support and the tensions around voicing needs for support and accessing support will be examined in more depth in Chapter 7.

Identity/ agency and power positionings:

In this final section to this chapter I will return to the ways the women described the significance that forming a lone mother household / separation / being single / mothering alone had for them. The effects were changes in their resources and relations as well as more profound changes in their ontological and categorical sources of identity (Taylor 1999). Earlier I set out three main clusters of identity positioning (stage 3 in figure 4.1):

- ◆ Lone motherhood as a catalyst for independence;
- ◆ Lone motherhood as a temporary family form;
- ◆ Lone motherhood as a source of vulnerability and special needs.

I will illustrate these processes briefly at this point, with reference to some typical cases. Firstly, Sue and Melissa provide examples of experiencing change in their priorities through the process of parental separation and living a lone /

being single. Melissa describes her values around wanting to have choice and self-determination to exit an unsatisfactory relationship:

"I suppose some people may have said you are mad you could have stayed you know. You have security, he was working, you had a place to live and all that sort of stuff but (sigh) in terms of my happiness and my sanity I choose to go that lonely road and walked out with two suitcases and you know. (Yep) And whatever else I came with..." (Melissa, 27, Afro-Caribbean mother)

However, although she values autonomy, after an experience of taking up higher education and having difficulties maintaining her course, she realises the delicate nature of her 'independence' and seeks support and connectedness with her ex-partner and brother.

Denise offers another example of valuing autonomy as a lone mother:

"Well I think possibly better than being a double parent. Than being a two parenting thing actually. I think there are benefits to being on your own bringing up a child because you can choose, well within. I think it gives you more control over your life actually. It has given me more control....Even though some aspects of it are... like the childcare aspect is potentially sometimes difficult. Having said that, there are people with partners who have still have difficulties. So I don't see that unless you have got one where there is an advantage - there is no advantage!! So I think I can choose what I do within the remit of having to go to work and earn money. Do you know what I mean? within that. But I can have more control over that anyway. So I think it is quite good really." (Denise, 38, white working class mother).

Tamara reflects on the last year. She felt her account would have been markedly different a year ago. She said then she was in a state of crisis, having recently left her husband. She was uncertain then if she could cope. Her sister and mother had offered their support but she wondered if that was 'enough'. She reflects that now she is feeling so positive about being a 'single mum'. Tamara goes on to compare her attitude to a friend of hers:

"There is a lot of people, I have one friend who is a single mum and she doesn't get any sympathy from me cos what I have been through and what I have done. I have worked really hard and I have done it for my kids. Um..whereas she sort of sits there and feels really sorry for herself and hasn't really got anywhere in life because she is a single mum yet ..she blames everybody else for it. I just think you get what you ...if you really want something you go out there and you can get

it. Yea Ok life doesn't always go the way you want it but you make the most of what you have got. And I just adore my kids. They are my complete number one, I wouldn't put anything before them.

Whereas she puts quite a few parties before her kids which.. you know we can all have fun. We can all do that, you know. But you know, we all put life in perspective, when you have got kids and um..I am just on such a positive one now." (Tamara, 34, white middle class woman)

All of these women had not found the decision to leave their ex-partners a simple one and had all expressed concern with coping alone. Over time, however, they adapted to their circumstances and affirmed their family relations. These kind of identity positionings as an autonomous woman arose in ten of the accounts. An important consideration was also that these mothers had tended to be lone mothers for longer and so were further on in their 'mothering career' (Ribbens and Edwards 1998). However, the following chapter does raise the issue that claims around coping as a lone mother could also be telling a moral tale around being a good coping mother, and Chapter 7 raises issues in the tensions between accessing support and claiming an identity as a coping / independent lone mother. Further most of these women still desired partners but stressed that the quality of a partnership was essential.

An example of the understanding of lone motherhood as a temporary family form can be illustrated through Sue's account, where she believed she would soon meet a man who could support her. She felt she would meet a new partner with whom she would share parenting tasks and authority. This is in contrast with some of the women taking up the subject position of autonomous lone mother. For example, Justine, as we saw earlier, felt that after a few years of being a lone mother, she would not co-habit or share parenting with a future partner.

The third subject position was that of lone mother as a source of vulnerability and risk. This relates to the social problem discourse of lone motherhood which offered the most dominant subject position. Risks for children, mothers and fathers were stressed.

Two thirds of the respondents reported difficulties in meeting the costs of providing for their children on their income. Kirsty represented this subject

position, as she felt constrained by the overwhelming responsibilities of being a lone mother:

"I am not depressed. I am not depressed. ..But I know what those feelings were like and know where my limitations are sometimes. I feel very vulnerable because I am on my own and I feel like I have a lot of responsibility, financially and in all sorts of lots of other ways." (Kirsty, 42, white middle class mother)

Sarah was concerned about the risks to her daughter's relationship with her father. Others reported the risk to their moral identity as 'good mothers' as they feared others judged them for their family status. Rather than a source of independence, they stressed the risks of a lack of connectedness, resources and support. This subject position was mainly dominant in the context of little choice in becoming a lone mother, lower incomes and beliefs in the desirability of couple parenting.

Conclusions:

The process of becoming a lone mother household does not seem to be a linear, straightforward event but a complex social process involving the negotiation of resources, normative guidelines / values and agency positioning / power structures. The relationship between living alone, being single, mothering alone and parental separation was also a complex one with these different aspects of experiences not necessarily happening together or leading on from one another. Living alone was more dependent on access to resources. Mothering alone related more to issues of support / autonomy. Being single and relationship separation involved complex negotiations between desires for connectedness, intimacy, safety and autonomy in the context of norms around coupledness and couple headed families. The data set here suggests that becoming a lone mother household was the outcome of a complex set of circumstances and decisions - some of which were in the hands of the women themselves, others that were very much experienced as beyond their control. Within these routes into lone motherhood, possible shifts could occur in the ways the mothers understood and related to lone motherhood as a source of meaningful identity. A shift from lone motherhood as initially an undesirable and problematic family form to an acceptable family form could occur especially over time if a woman remained

single or living alone. The process of becoming a lone mother household could be understood as a time of change, continuity or crisis. Lone motherhood for some involved a separation between residency, partnership and parenting while for others this separation *was felt* prior to lone motherhood, or for others continuity of family ties was more prominent. Although there were diverse particulars in each account, these overall features of process, factors and consequences were discernible at the level of subjective meaning and subject positioning.

Part 3: Maternal Agency in Context

Chapter Five

Intensive Mothering? Positioning Identity and Practices in Relation to Intensive Mothering

Introduction:

In the previous two chapters I have illustrated some of the ways that mothers' negotiated their lived experiences of lone motherhood. Living alone, being single, mothering alone and parental separation did not necessarily occur together and provided sources of meaningful identity / experiences in alternative ways. Factors such as normative guidelines, values, relationships and resources shaped these experiences. This chapter focuses on these inter-connections and complexities further through a focus on normative guidelines and representations of motherhood.

In this chapter, I argue that positioning one's practices and identities as a mother (as well as when negotiating the relationship between paid work, providing and motherhood as we shall see in the following chapter) involved engaging with a socially recognised and discernible discourse of intensive mothering¹ (Hays 1996; Cheal 2003; Jovilet 1997). The significance of the discourse of intensive mothering, and women's own meanings and positionings in relation to this ideology can be traced in many of the issues already discussed in this thesis. Intensive mothering can 'look' very similar to mothering alone – where the mother is centred as the primary agent responsible for, and expert in, meeting children's needs. Women themselves can feel intensive mothering is forced on them by others' lack of support, and social expectations / normative guidelines, or they can assert their values in upholding notions of intensive mothering. The overall force of issues of the over-burdened and unsupported nature of lone motherhood makes sense in relation to the idea that motherhood is labour intensive, directive and aims to meet children's multiple needs. The women in

this study negotiated a position that either supported or challenged the idea of 'intensive mothering'; as well as claiming either an expertise and choice in mothering this way or claiming a sense of experiencing it as an overwhelming role (Hays 1996). The consequences of attempting to meet the demands of intensive mothering were huge for the women's lives. Either one could attempt to produce the 'citizen in the making' or the 'child in development', or one needed to justify in a morally acceptable way why they were either ill-suited, unable or unwilling to 'do' motherhood in this way. Firstly, a brief reminder of what the key features of the ideology discourses of intensive mothering involve. This is followed by an examination of how the women in this study centred this ideology and negotiated their positions and practices in relation to it.

Intensive mothering

On an international as well as national scale good mothering can often mean 'intensive mothering' (Cheal 2003). Cheal further argues that intensive mothering is found in any society where competition, individual effort and achievement is celebrated in the dominant culture (Cheal 2003: 105). The child in ideologies of intensive mothering is viewed, and hence treated, as a 'citizen in the making' (Neale and Smart 1998). They are also viewed as dependent on others for their developmental needs. Children are an empty vessel to fill with knowledge, experiences and awareness so that they can develop along the lines of 'normal and proper development'. Functional theories of motherhood in the UK provide a classic intensive mothering position. Here a child is needy and dependent, untamed and dangerous without the constant care and attention from a mother (Lawler 2000; Wallbank 2001). In fact a vast amount of psychological theories are based on the premise of children as their parents' / society's 'project in development' (Donzelot 1980; Wallbank 2001; Phoenix 1996; Glenn et al 1997). The child as dependent, immature, irrational, irresponsible, incomplete, a 'project' places the demand on parents (and others i.e the extended family / state in Japan), to invest the necessary resources, care, time, energy, attention and teaching to ensure appropriate development. The imperative to socialise, moralise, control and care for children is established (James and Prout 1990). One alternative to intensive mothering may be a notion of non-directive mothering whereby a child is allowed to grow up of its own accord (Cheal 2003),

or whereby a child is viewed as an agent with abilities for moral reasoning, in touch with their own needs, able to make appropriate choices, trusted and self-determining (Neale and Smart 1998; James and Prout 1990; Alderson 1993). James and Prout (1990) note that the view of child as agent is gaining ground, emerging in various forms in legal / social / political discourses. Many sociologists and welfare practitioners are engaged in a project to recognise this image of the child (Neale and Smart 1998; Williams 2004). However, James and Prout believe that the model of intensive mothering is still extensive and pervades our images, thinking and practices towards children:

“..the conception of children as inadequately socialised future adults still retains a powerful hold on the social, political, cultural and economic agenda” (James and Prout 1990: xiv).

The implications of this image are varied for mothers themselves. They may view mothering as an exercise of intense labour and resources invested in one's child from which one hopes to see 'developmental' returns (Cheal 2003). Intensive mothering involves sacrificing one's 'self', one's own life concerns, aspirations or identities, in favour of one's role as a mother (Lawler 2000). One's time and energy should be devoted to the relationship with your child and maintaining an appropriate family life / environment for development (Cheal 2003). Hays notes that intensive mothering is labour intensive, emotionally absorbing, expert-guided, child-centred and financially expensive (Hays 1996). The child's needs are placed before the mother's needs. Expectations of particular returns for one's labour, such as a close mother – child bond and normal development, form part of the performance monitoring of 'good motherhood'. Good parenting (as there are also intensive expectations for fatherhood too but these are less developed in this thesis) is viewed as the solution and foundation of appropriate adult development. Furedi alternatively coined this a belief in 'parental determinism' as good parenting is seen as the basis for moral development individually and societally (Furedi 2001) .

Positioning in relation to intensive mothering:

In this data set three configurations around constructions of discourses of intensive mothering have been analytically developed. These are:

- Intensive mothering as a normative set of guidelines and in practice;
- Intensive mothering as a normative set of guidelines but not achieved in practice;
- Placing limits and boundaries around maternal responsibilities and interference in children's development as a set of normative guidelines and practice.

These positions were not fixed categories or identity positions. Rather they emerge as a clustering of representations of maternal identity, purpose and practices. The position a mother holds (which is also changeable and vulnerable to uncertainties in some cases) frames maternal actions. In the next chapter, I will relate these positions to the concept of gendered moral rationalities in the context of the relationship between paid work and motherhood. In the following chapter I will argue that positioning in relation to intensive mothering influences views on labour market participation, although this was not the only influence so a direct relation to actual labour market participation can not be claimed. I will now turn to illustrate these positions which were negotiated and embedded in context of values, relationships, resources and discourses as I have previously noted in earlier chapters.

Intensive mothering as a normative set of guidelines and in practice

The centring of the role of mothers on children's development was apparent in twenty-two of the accounts of motherhood. I would also include the second representation of maternal identity, practice and role listed above in consensus with this view of the mother – child relation. The second representation above, also involved centring the ideology of intensive mothering but differed, as respondents positioned their performance / capacities as limited in meeting normative standards. I have placed a further nine of the accounts in this second configuration – so overall a total of thirty-one of the respondents seemed to view

their maternal role in this way. Drawing on the ideology of intensive mothering was the dominant representation of ‘good’ mothering in this data set. The significance of intensive mothering did not directly link with the social context of mothering such as the mother’s class, age, ethnic or educational social location but instead cut across various contexts. To say the mothers shared this view of good mothering is not to say that they held the same meanings, emphasis and practices as these varied on an individual basis but they did share a sense of the child as ‘project’, as dependent, and of mothers as ‘responsible for the development of the project’ (Ribbens 1994). The last representation above seemed to vary from this focus by alternatively positioning the child as self-determining. The child as ‘project’ or ‘agent’ can be described as the subject position offered to children. The table below lists some of the central features of intensive mothering.

Table 5.1 : Features of intensive mothering, normative guidelines and practices

Respondent:	Features of maternal practices / values that demonstrate ideology of intensive mothering (central activities / aspects of caring for children):
Trisha	Being there, being available, making the decisions, control / discipline, protect children from risks.
Melissa	Being there, being available, attention, providing love and understanding, providing social activities.
Katlin	Constant care, maintaining your child’s health.
Mary	Control, providing care and security.
Lucinda	Togetherness, care, opportunities to learn and build relationships
Sarah	Constant attention, being there, building close relationships, supporting education
Christine	Control, protection from risks, care, having fun, being there, being available.
Susan	Providing home-made food / clothes, providing opportunities for activities and learning, building close relationships, discipline.
Hazel	Giving your child your full attention, togetherness, supporting learning and building relationships.
Maria	Being available, being there, attention, love, understanding, care,

	opportunities for social activities.
Lea	Control and protection from risks.
Susan	Care, control/ discipline
Sue	Constantly being available, opportunities to learn and relax, having fun, providing attention
Estelle	Providing love, understanding and opportunity to learn. Build relationships.
Tamara	Providing love, protection from risks, discipline, having fun, opportunities for building relationships and doing activities.
Becky	Constant care and attention
Kathleen	Support learning
Heather	Protect from risks, provide care and attention
Catherine	Protect from risks, control and discipline.
Cathy	Care, control, fun activities
Elizabeth	Provide care, opportunities for activities and being there.

These examples will be illustrated below.

Positioning the child as dependent / needy and mother as responsible:

Many of the mothers explicitly claimed that their children were primarily their responsibility. For example, Lucinda characterised her experiences of becoming a mother as taking on this 'constant' responsibility for children:

"I think the biggest change [when you have a baby] is that you are not on your own, and you have got someone to look after constantly. I can't really explain it very well, but the fact that it is not just you, you have got someone that is your responsibility and it is all the time. " (Lucinda, 28, white working class woman)

Melissa also remarks on the major responsibilities she felt she had. She characterises her daughter as dependent on her for 'everything' which she felt was a 'huge responsibility':

"It's hard to put your finger on it and say it is that. It's not, it just really does open up a whole new world, a whole new experience. When you realise this little thing is dependent on you for everything. You know. It is a huge huge responsibility. (Sigh) But you know, you take everyday as it comes!!" (Melissa, 27, Afro-Caribbean middle class mother)

Lucinda describes how responsibility for a child extends your responsibility for yourself to others as well:

"You know you are in charge of a child not just yourself." (Lucinda, 28, white working class woman)

Being a responsible mother for the majority meant meeting children's needs. This was often described in terms of constant labour and negotiation between assessing what your child's needs are and acting in an appropriate way. Practices needed working out. Hazel talks about 'never stopping' and 'doing everything for her kids':

"I can't let things happen from day to day and let life happen. I have made a conscious commitment to be a success. Everything that happens I have got to work that out. If I do something..say I spend an evening and I am bad tempered and I shout at them, then the next day I have to undo it. I have to get their moods right and everything." (Hazel, 36, Afro-Caribbean working class woman)

'Not letting things happen from day to day' for Cheal (2003), and Furedi (2001) is a central feature of intensive mothering and parental determinism. I asked Hazel further what being a success entailed. She replied that she would like to keep her children out of trouble, mentally well and interested in their education so that they can get good jobs. In this endeavour Hazel will not 'let herself stop'. Hazel elaborates this several times in the interview. In the extract below Helen has been giving an account of maintaining her children's education:

"They have had one day off [from school] because I could see they were going to get ill. So Friday I wrapped them up, gave them paracetamol, and just looked after them really well so that they didn't have to have time off school. I don't like them missing off school."

H: "You don't?"

"So they don't get in a habit with it, and myself too. The moment I stop making myself do everything..I have got to do without a break, I could really do with a break of about two weeks. Just not do anything. You know, let everything go and not do anything at all and really use the time. Just sit and read or something, and not have to do anything...not have to go out, not have to do the clothes" (Hazel, 36, Afro-Caribbean, working class woman)

A sense of dependency and obligation comes across strongly in Hazel's account as well as a sense of values to provide 'good mothering' in her eyes. The context of her own background of an unsatisfactory childhood, mental illness in her family and perhaps her ethnic location (Hazel herself only refers to her family background) have all contributed to her sense of obligation to intensively care for her children. Hazel could have operating with a view that her sons, as young black men, require extra support to overcome stereotypes of educational disadvantage or failure. Education plays a significant role for Hazel in aiding her children to escape 'failure'.

'Putting children first' was a common way of expressing one's intention to be a 'good' mother and 'responsible mother'. Janet also explicitly stated that putting her children first demonstrated her own sense of morality and good parenting:

"No my parents have never been much good really. And maybe that's why I have always been so independent and strong anyway. My mum left home when I was 15, and my dad kept us and he was hopeless. Bless him. He went to work and he went to the pub. He didn't have a clue about caring for our emotional needs. Very selfish people, both of our parents. Which was why I think the reason why I have made a deliberate effort to have strong relationships with my kids. I don't want to be like them. My brother and sister have not done much better. My sister in particular, she's absolutely awful! I never have anything to do with her. My brother is different, he was the youngest and he suffered much more with the break-up of the parents marriage." (Janet, 45, white working class woman)

Hazel evoked a sense that putting your child first was a 'normal' priority among parents and she was upholding such principles when she was not taking up paid work that didn't fit around her children's school routine:

"It is good to be independent I reckon so. It is something you have to commit to. I had major commitment to bring them up the best I can and not just going about it everyday and letting it happen. (Um) Actually made a conscious commitment and letting it happen everyday. Actually made a conscious commitment to do it for at least probably until he is five and then again make a different one until he is ten." (Hazel, 36, Afro-Caribbean woman)

Many also spoke of the implications for themselves of putting their children first such as 'being preoccupied with their needs' or sacrificing their own aspirations.

For example, Danni talks about taking parenting 'seriously' and the costs for her in doing so. Danni also expressed a lack of motivation and choice in having her child but she voiced a concern to be a 'good' parent:

H: *"How did you find becoming a mother?"*

"Horrible I hated it!!!! When she first came out I didn't even bond with her at all. I didn't think like you are supposed to..well, I thought you should bond with them [the baby].. that you love them and I didn't. I didn't want a kid, she wasn't planned. It took so much getting used to, to not be able to do what you want to. I was so used to doing what I wanted. I didn't like the lack of sleep. The carrying things around. It was mainly the lack of freedom. But I didn't have my own timetable. Just basically my life isn't my own. Because of my own childhood I take children very seriously. Having children makes life not your own. Even though you can change your lifestyle a bit. You need a week in advance for planning to go out. Instead of just walking out of the door. " (Danni, 28, Asian middle class woman)

Caring for children:

This theme relates to the distinction between caring for children (the physical tasks involved in providing care) and caring about children (an ethos / orientation that also involves emotional attachment and investment (Graham 1984; Williams 2001). Practices and ethos around 'caring about' will be reviewed in the following section. In terms of 'caring for,' many of the women highlighted their role and responsibilities for caring for their children in order to maintain their child's wellbeing and development.

The imperative to provide daily basic needs for subsistence, food, housing, health and warmth was a major preoccupation for mothers of young children in particular. Care is intensive at this time. Many of the women narrated their typical day as revolving around the preparation of food, personal care and domestic activities. Elizabeth values this aspect of care-giving for her seven month old baby:

"I think it is wonderful bringing up a child. Ok you don't get much sleep and everything like that, but it is really nice playing with her and also you feel you are giving so much. When breastfeeding you are giving the goodness into her, I feel better in myself. It is constant doing things for her, but I like that." (Elizabeth, 26, white working class woman).

Christine and Janet had older teenage children (Janet also had a pre-school child), but still stressed the dependency of these teenagers on their mother's care. Both of the mothers were concerned that their teenage children could not care for themselves as well as they could care for them. For example, Christine refers to providing their evening meal:

"I think it is nice for them. I like to be home after school so that I can provide the evening meal. They would eat junk food otherwise.." (Christine, 44, white working class woman)

Caring about:

'Caring about' a child was often highlighted as a key feature of children's needs. 'Caring about' encompasses the relational and emotional investment in children. It stresses the need for intimate connectedness. Many of the mothers felt that an ethos of 'care, love and nurturing' were fundamental aspects of mothering. For example, Melissa simply states:

"My child just needs love and understanding." (Melissa, 27, middle class Afro-Caribbean woman)

Many of the mothers discussed the tensions between taking responsibility, caring for your child and caring about. Tamara felt unable to meet what she considered to be adequate standards of mothering when she was going through her divorce. She describes shouting at her children on a regular basis:

"When we first moved out they must have thought they had an ogre for a mum. I did used to shout at them at on a regular basis. I was just so stressed with everything. We were living in a horrible flat, not like round here. The people were unwelcoming. Round here they are much nicer. My mum told me to stop talking about the divorce in front of them..I was just finding it all so hard. But now I try to make it all as much fun as possible. We have lots of cuddles, I really love them and they seem happier" (Tamara, 36, white middle class woman).

Showing how much you care was hard in the context of stressful lives for some of the women. Conflict between parents, which could continue post-separation, was one of these contexts. Lucinda and Danni felt emotionally distraught after arguments with their ex-partners. Danni talks about the impact this had sometimes on her mothering:

"He is just so detriment to me. Ian drops her back or calls by at times which are later than we agreed. He can't keep a regular time. He criticises me and causes conflict. He leaves and then I can't be bothered to do anything. I don't feel like doing my chores or not up for giving [my daughter] attention. I just get so ..I feel like I don't care anymore. When he isn't around I am OK. He does try and help but he makes real problems for me when he does. He will come and take her out and then drop her back and spend the next hour arguing after he has come back and that disturbs her and upsets me and makes me feel like I can't be bothered to do my chores or whatever I have to do because I can't be bothered. Because I am not in the mood. It is often in front of her that we argue, and so it upsets her and it is a step backwards. It is not how I want her to be brought up. I had a nice childhood and I want her to have the same." (Danni, 28, Asian middle class woman)

But caring about and for her daughter is very important to Danni. She goes on to describe her mothering priorities and some values she is committed to:

H: *"What kind of things would that include?"*

"A nice childhood? Security, that is the most important thing. I can give her love. But if I don't give her security she doesn't know where to turn when she needs someone. I have got to be the parent because she is the child and she doesn't have to be trying to calm arguments down or you know, or even calm herself down. She shouldn't have to do that. That should be done for her. She shouldn't have to see it. She will repeat the pattern I think as well. It's the basis for life isn't it - the examples you see from your parents."

H: *Could you tell me a bit more about what you would like to give her security wise?*

"Security - well it is mainly emotional security and a place for her to live. Actually, I believe you can live anywhere as long as they are emotionally secure. Kids can adapt. It is financial as well. A bit anyway, as long as you have enough. To get good clothes and shoes and food and everything else. Just the best you can really in every way. Education. Security um I don't know. Just knowing there is someone there...It is providing what ever they need." (Danni, 28, Asian middle class woman)

Danni is presenting a case for intensive mothering here where she is responsible for providing a range of care and developmental needs for her daughter. Being temporarily unable to fulfil your responsibilities for many reasons such as illness or tiredness was a source of concern. Lauren feels that when she 'stops', her children's world 'stops' which presents a powerful example of inescapable responsibility:

"Your kids know when you are really ill. They go all quiet. You have stopped working. If you stop doing everything at home, they think, OK, and everything stops. If you can't function their world stops. That is when it is a bit scary for them. They are fretting and pondering. They are wondering what is happening? Am I going to be alright?" (Lauren, 36, Afro Caribbean working class woman).

Being there / being available / providing attention:

'Being there' has been highlighted by many researchers as an important value in mother – child relations (Ribbens 1994). Being there, along with sentiments of being available and providing your child with understanding, recognition and attention all emphasise the relational aspects of mothering. Mothers are tied to children due to children's needs for interaction, maternal bonding, support and direction. In practice, again, the normative guideline needs working out. The guideline can also be experienced as a source of pleasure and intimacy with feelings of togetherness, closeness, bonding and unity positively expressed. Here children's needs for interaction and secure relationships is constructed. Sustaining relationships with children is an immense source of enjoyment. But sometimes 'being there' can be hard to achieve. Further 'being there' can be a source of constraint and constant demands. Here the varied implications for mothers are considered.

Tamara, Mary, Lucinda and Christine, for example, refer to the enjoyment they value from spending time with their children. Tamara actively attempts to produce a sense of family togetherness through eating meals sitting at a table together. This activity has significance as a time of sharing:

"...A lot of my friends can't believe that we sit down and have every meal at the table with them. I was brought up that way and it means that they have got good table manners. But a lot of my friends think I am being really strict doing that. But I don't think so, I think it is just a nice way of bringing up your kids you know."

(Her sister joins in the conversation) S: "Also it gives you a sense of family, which I think is important when you are a single mum to have that time where you are together. Do you know what I mean?"

"Yea, it is so important, we were brought up in a really happy family, it was always our time when we all sat round and chatted three times a day." (Tamara, 34, white middle class woman)

Tamara has divorced her husband and won a legal settlement for her husband to pay maintenance until her two sons are school age (in 2 years time at the interview) and to buy a house for them. This enables Tamara to spend more time with her children:

"Yep, the courts. Because I very nearly said fine sod it I will go on benefits, you can do whatever, I was very nearly not going to go through, and challenge him. But I am glad I did because this is, you know, I get maintenance until they go to school and then I will go to work. So I have three years of spending 24 hours a day with my kids and I don't have to do anything." (Tamara, 34, white middle class woman)

It was quite typical for a mother to express the following sentiment of the rewarding nature of your relationship with your child as well as the demands it places on you:

" I have made it sound all doom and gloom but it is not. It's hard work...But then again we have great fun. We go on holiday together, we have really good fun and we spend evenings together and have really good fun. Do you know what I mean?" (Mary, 38, white working class woman)

" So you have a quick coffee. And then preparing the dinner, and then my two go a bit crazy!! And then they are so funny, they just but they are really lively, they are not naughty and they don't argue anymore. They have got their own bedroom now that Jen has moved out. But they are just full of life and they are on the go. How can I explain Jennifer? (Asks her daughter). She has just got all this energy. She is sixteen. She has just got, and she is giggly, and she's ...like if you are doing the dinners she will come behind you and knock your knees. She doesn't stop annoying you but it's all done in fun. And so you have got this constantly. My sister said Oh, whats that? Sounds like you are having fun, I'm coming down. Yer, I said but it doesn't stop. You want to watch the telly but it doesn't stop. ..And then they are having a crazy time and they are enjoying themselves." (Christine, 43, white working class woman)

"I really like little things like she gets in my bed most nights. It was just this morning like I was drinking my cup of tea and we were in bed watching telly. We were cuddled up. (pause)." (Lucinda, 27, white working class woman)

Being with your children was a pleasurable source of intimacy and togetherness. However, intensive mothering through this one-to-one relationship with your child and spending as much time as possible giving your child attention can be hard to achieve in practice. Being there has to be balanced with other needs such as domestic labour or needs for autonomy. Geeta is concerned that her daughter

is too dependent on her. She feels having one child and one adult in a family / household creates a dependency relationship that is not entirely beneficial for the child. She discusses her daughter's needs for 'attention':

"And it is hard work. You don't get any time off. There is no one to take over when you are feeling tired. Or when you are not feeling well. Also, because she is an only child. I think if I had had more children when I was married or if she had brothers or sisters, they tend to entertain each other."

H: *"You get it all.."*

"Because my neighbour ..she has three children and they are quite happy to wake up in the morning and play with each other or watch the telly together. Whereas Penny, she would wake me up and say, hello Mum I do love you. And ask - Oh can I go and put the telly on? Even though she knows she can. As soon as she wakes up she has got to have my attention."

And that goes on throughout the day. I wouldn't trade it in. But there is just the two of you and also being an only child, you end up doing everything together. But um ...it is good, also I think they become very dependent on you." (Geeta, 45, white working class woman)

Geeta attempts to display her affection for her child while talking about her concerns for too much dependency. This concern is a tricky issue for Geeta as it may risk her moral identity as a good mother if she complains about her relationship with her daughter. It also displays the complex feelings of pleasure and ambivalence in intensive mothering relationships.

Some of the mothers remarked on the extent of their children's needs for interaction. Mia finds a tension between domestic labour tasks and being there. Also it is worth noting that she equates good caring below with giving a child your attention and interaction:

"At first I was depressed about the idea of moving back in with my Mum and my stepfather [when I was pregnant]. ..I had been away from home for 5 years. I don't get along that well with my stepfather, so I was little bit depressed about being there. It was just the idea of being back at home. Then I started to adjust and then I was glad I was living with them because my mother was a big help. They are really good with her. They have been a big help. Giving her attention. When I first moved in here, it was a big help. She was so used to getting all the attention all the time. Even if I had to do the dishes she would start screaming. I never really cooked at my Mum's. Just giving her attention and she is used to having lots of people around. So that was quite an adjustment. Lots of screaming fits!!"

I try to organise my day so that I spend a lot of time playing with her. So I study at night. And then during the day I can take her to things like a baby and music class. I have still got to do housework, and cook meals. Sometimes I feel really guilty when I am doing it but I have to do it." (Mia, 27, white middle class woman)

Kathleen also referred to her son's need for constant attention and interaction:

"He was a really good baby, I think because he was getting attention all the time. But he now wants constant attention and you know. He just wants information constantly. I am like I can't do it. Don't just ask me again."

H: *"Can you give me an example of that?"*

"Fred saying why all the time? Erer ..anything anything that happens he wants to know how the washing machine works, how the water gets down from the roof, down the pipe and into the water in the gutter? Then what happens to the water in the gutter? So I am having to explain every single detail over and over again. It's like Ok, why? Actually this morning, Do you know that advert with Chris Eubank? I n i t t h e y a r e s c a r e d o f s p i d e r s . H e a s k e d , w h y a r e t h e y s c a r e d o f s p i d e r s . I s a i d , w e l l a c t u a l l y i t i s j u s t a j o k e . W e l l , w h y i s i t a j o k e ? A n d h e ..I don't know if his sense of humour isn't as dry as mine, but he couldn't understand so you think well where do I stop? How much is he going to take in? How much is he going to understand? Where do I stop? Cos I could sit here and tell him about irony for hours but then he is four. And also I want to get breakfast and so a lot of time now I have started saying well why do you think? And then he will go into this long spiel about because the water goes down the drain pipe and the drain pipe goes down to the gutter and so on.

Whatever, but um.. His friends don't seem to do the same thing. They ask why a couple of times and then are quite content with the answer. He is not. He is just hard work. And when you are by yourself it is like ..give me a break. Or first thing in the morning, that is when I can't handle it." (Kathleen, 27, white middle class woman)

Christine felt that her teenage children still had needs for their mother to be available and 'there' in the home to maintain a relationship (as well as to monitor their behaviour and activities as we shall see later). Although her children were older, she felt the need to fit her work hours around school hours as 'it is nice' to have your mother at home after school:

"But I think it is nice to be there when they come home from school. My mum was always there for me. It is nice after a long day to see your mum at the end of it."

H: *"So how did you feel when you worked till 5?"*

"I found.. cos it is sort of ongoing all the time.. aren't you? I would go straight from playgroup to work, coming home, and handing over my role to Jennifer. But still coming home and carry on with the housework and I was finding it all fairly stressful. Taking it out on the children. Which you do, well I did anyway.

I couldn't have kept it up. I wanted to because then we could have had a holiday but I was getting tired and it was best not to work and be happy at home than to work and be giving everybody a hard time. So we didn't have a holiday. That was that this year. " (Christine, 42, white working class mother)

While a normative guideline to maintain a close relationship and meaningful interaction with your child was widely recognised, some of the mothers were uncertain if they were actually 'too close' to their child or their child was 'too dependent on them'. This tended to be an issue particularly when a mother was living alone with an only child. Geeta mentioned this earlier when she was concerned in the context of living alone with her only daughter that 'you end up doing everything together' and 'they become more dependent on you'. Heather also mentioned this in her discussion about her son. For Heather, the line between being 'close' and 'too close' is an uncertain one. Heather, Geeta and Mia all had one child and formed a solo child / adult household. This could have provided the context for further intensification of this dyad relationship:

"One of the worst things is that I am too close to him. I sometimes feel that we are much too ... That I am too involved. Because I don't have anyone else there. And that that might be kind of detrimental to him and to me. I am too wrapped up in him. Well, things like, well you know, Ricky as well. That is probably his personality anyway. He is very very quiet and shy – he wants to be with me most of the time and me as well I suppose. I have got to the stage now where I can't be bothered going out. And do you know what I mean? It is much easier to stay in with him. And I am very worried about him and what he is going to be like. I am sure every parent feels that. But when it is just you. If you had someone else there and it is your responsibility as well then you can discuss it and you know. And they would have a major influence on their lives. His major influence is just me.. I think that is quite hard.

Cos it is just always us two and that is quite difficult. But I do think there is positive aspects to there just being the two of you. I don't think it is all negative. At the end of the day it is really good to be so close. There are drawbacks, he is far too clingy and I worry far too much his wellbeing. I don't think that is healthy. " (Heather, 28, white middle class woman)

Hazel also discussed over dependency, even though her son was 18 months. Although Hazel had five sons, her other sons were at school during the day and

then went to visit their father at the weekends. She was keen that her younger son attend a nursery while she took up training courses as a means of not only providing much needed childcare but also to increase her son's 'independence' from her:

"Well, I have wanted to do [the training course] since Toby was about three months old. But I had to wait till he was a year old to get a nursery place. Cos I couldn't really afford a childminder (Um) and he was too young. When he was a year old I went back (Um)...//..It's sort of on site. They have got the crèche on site but they have also got the building across the road. (Yep). And you pay for that. There are probably about six or seven adults there for the children. It is really good. They get looked after really well. (yer) He is really happy there. (Yea)

But then again he was always with me because like, um, I haven't got family and friends around. So he is always always always with me. He was driving me mad!

He was much clingier than um. After being with all the boys during the week and that, at the weekend we come home. We will be at home because they go off to their Dad's and he will just cling to me for about two days solid because his routine is changed from going out every day. He just clings. So with other adults around he has got a bit more independent." (Hazel, 37, Afro-Caribbean working class woman)

The imperative to give your child attention and be there for them, therefore was resisted at times. The context of mothering alone, as I noted earlier can be experienced in a way akin to enforced intensive solo mothering.

Being there could also encompass notions of protection and regulating children's misbehaviour. The issue of protection in this data set arose in accounts that involved experiences of domestic violence and where a mother was living in an area considered 'rough'. Trisha, Tamara and Susan raised the issue of protection against strangers and rough neighbours. Trisha discusses protecting her sons due to what they have been through and from 'rough neighbours':

"It was really good because it was there when we needed it [the refuge], so it was good. We had a few problems when we were in there because I wouldn't let anyone near the kids. Other kids ..if they went near them, I would just go mental. And, I got into sooo many arguments with the mothers....And if anyone went near my kids I used to go mad at them. But Justin was really protective over Arthur. Because, I didn't have the youngest then. And if anyone went anywhere near Arthur, he would just go for them.

I have been to hell and back with my kids but considering I am on my own and they don't get slapped. They have never been in trouble with the police. They are not as bad as half of the kids round here. But I don't like them mixing too much with the kids round here." (Trisha, 38, white working class woman)

I further asked her, what are the kids round here like?

"Not very nice. You have got all the drug families and what have you. I don't really want them having anything to do with that lot. We have a family across the road selling drugs. I told them all straight cos I talk to them, if I ever find out that anyone tried selling my kids anything, I will cut their throats!! That is one of my biggest worries. But what I did was I went down to the doctors and got a load of booklets and leaflets off the doctors on drugs. I gave them to Justin to read. ..I don't mind them going to their friends for tea or to play for a couple of hours. But that's it. And that is very rare. If I really need them to. Like if I am having appointments when I won't be back in time. Like this coming Monday. Chris will be picked up by his friends and he will go for tea. Then I will pick him up at half past five when I get back." (Trisha, 38, white working class woman)

Trisha feels the need to protect her children from many risks. She refers to not 'needing anyone else' and prefers to be 'independent'. This independence leads to intensive mothering as Trisha centres her role in meeting all her children's needs. The focus on protection however, is framed by her experiences of violence and her view of her risky local neighbourhood.

Being there also encompassed a sense of monitoring children's behaviour and offering moral guidance. This was an issue in Trisha's account above. Christine also emphasised monitoring the behaviour and actions of her older teenage children. We heard above how Christine preferred to be home after school, rather than work full-time, to 'be there' for her children. She also feared her daughter would get involved with rough neighbours if she was not home to monitor her behaviour:

"But if I wasn't there, if she was naughty no-one could ground her...You see that is a big thing as well. You still need to be there as a parent. To have your rules set. It was quite a big time wasn't it? They were in at half past three and I wasn't in till seven o'clock. So that is a long time from when you are not there. And it is when they come in from school and they come in and say this and this has happened. And by the time you get home they have chatted on the way home and that makes me think no. So I find it difficult."

H: "So is it for you quite important that you are there after school?"

"Um...even as they get older I think it is still. Because um.. it's like the routine isn't it. They are there and you talk about what has happened during the day. Ok, she is normally in and out as well because she is in clubs like football club and so on. But, you know, you are there when they come home and you know where she is going to. Cos up till now, she has a little group of friends and they want to go off Outerville and do things. And if I am not there for her to tell me then she won't. I feel if I am not here then she will be a child that will go astray. If you aren't there to say don't do that or I want you in by a certain time. I need...you were half an hour late, you can't go out tomorrow. Well you can't ground me cos you aren't going to be here. You are not here to tell me. And then that will get worse and bigger like a problem."

H: "What kind of things are you worried about?"

"I think it is being led astray with the wrong gangs. We have this little gang that hangs about outside, down the street. You know they are on drugs and drink. And that is where she plays football in front of the centre where we come to the playgroup. And also they do training inside as well. It is like basically getting involved in the wrong crowd." (Christine, 42, white working class woman)

Connected to these issues of 'being' there were issues of maintaining boundaries in order to teach your child about proper moral conduct.

Boundary setting and discipline:

Themes of boundary setting and disciplining illustrate aspects of control between a mother and her child (this study has not referred to fathers in their own right, but this is not to imply that control is more of an issue in mother – child relations than father – child relations). Processes of control and domination over children emerged from the legitimate authority that mothers' felt they possessed as the primary adult responsible for their child's development. Again, learning 'boundaries' and 'discipline' are seen as fundamental to moral development and socialisation needs in the ideology of intensive mothering. Melissa felt that it was important to 'discipline' her child so that she could maintain 'control' and 'authority' in her interactions with her daughter. This was viewed as essential for her child's social development. Melissa used smacking as one medium to control her child. This she realised was contentious and many may feel smacking is in tension with the ideas of caring for your child and offering understanding:

"Her Dad had really strong views about me smacking her. In fact it was at Flowers Park, it was here one day... I think it might have been the Otterworth Gazette, the issue was smacking. And they were asking parents if they minded taking part in conducting this interview. David had come to me and said um.. I don't want you to smack Lynn. She used to see him every other weekend. When she was with him Lynn would say Mummy has smacked me. And so Phillip was like, how dare you smack my child!! Ohh.. I was like you know ..if I feel that it's necessary to discipline then I will.. we had this massive row about it – he was saying only uneducated people smack their children. So I said Ok, (uha). ..//..I said people are always telling you what you do with your kids. Um.. I listen to all of what's around. And then I make my own mind about it.

And I will occasionally smack. I will use everything possible. I will use my eyes. My voice – don't you dare, I will use the tone of my voice. I am telling you don't do that, don't play with that. Don't play near the banisters. And if it is still going on it is just a quick one smack and it is a smack out of anger. It is.. I'm angry. Told you don't do it, don't push me.

..//..So um.. yer.. I still do have total confidence in what I am doing.

As in I only ever smack when I am angry. It is different when the anger has passed and then you go. Because it has changed to something else. Either being malicious or devious. And Lynn can see that I am angry you know.

And she will push, she likes to push it. So I tell her this is where the line is and if you push that line. You know. I'm sure. It is not meant to physically hurt her, it is shown as a sign. ..Sometimes it is great we can go for months and months without me ever having to raise a hand to her. And stuff like that. And then she will just go through a difficult patch. Or um.. it could be my own patterns of pre-menstrual mode. That naturally occurs in a woman I believe it is there for a reason. It is to say stop trampling all over me, can't you see I am tired. Maybe my views might change later on about smacking.

I just see the difference between Lynn and other kids. They are wild, you know wild. The parents are more afraid of the children than the children are of the parents. That won't do. That won't do. They look to you for guidance." (Melissa, 28, Afro Caribbean woman)

Melissa felt it was her 'right' to smack her child if she thought it was necessary for her child's development. For Melissa maintaining her authority was seen as significant to her child's needs for guidance.

Sarah found 'instilling boundaries' a complex activity as a parent. She describes her daughter not recognising her maternal authority:

"Then bed. Yer bed is becoming a real nightmare. It always has been with Annabel. That tenacious thing that kept her crying all night is still there to a

degree but in a more mature way. She's very, very active child. I don't think she needs as much sleep as me. This is probably quite a childish thing, but she really doesn't like to be uninvolved. If there is something going on then she wants to be involved in it. And she is always pushing me and I end up shouting you know.

Cos I will first of say, go to bed darling, it is time to go to bed. Then there will always be something. She will always not go or I'll say goodnight but she won't go. Then she will say I want to do this and this. Can I have a hot chocolate suddenly when you know its time to go to bed. Then up again. To the point where I say Annabel!!

But then again that is a boundaries thing. I am not very good with the boundaries thing. I tend to be quite easy going and then, No go to bed now or you are going to be smacked!!" (Sarah, 28, white middle class mother)

Educational needs and providing social activities:

Many of the mothers aimed to provide social activities such as taking their children to playgroups, toddler groups, music groups or on days out. Maria was among many of the women who felt constrained in their ability to provide financially for resourcing these activities. Maria, Jan, Trisha, Heather and Sue were all members of a local lone parent group, which they all valued as a source of cheap and discounted social activities.

The cost of social activities was a common theme. Lucinda remarked on her perception of middle class mothers as more able to take up social activities:

"I think probably the thing we go without the most is just doing stuff and going places. Like ..um..I always have this image and it is probably not how it is at all. I have this image of all these middle class women jumping in the car and taking their kids to er..God knows where..like to the Wildlife Park because we never go there. Just getting in the car and going there. It's like the summer holidays, what can you do? There is only so much you can do. Because we weren't going on holiday." (Lucinda, 27, white working class woman)

Other educational / social activities were helping with homework and providing lessons such as swimming lessons.

These various aspects of maternal responsibility and normative guidelines, and their negotiation in practice, have already suggested many of the issues for the

second cluster of mothers – those who can be distinguished by a position of uncertainty about their performance as a mother.

Intensive mothering as a normative set of guidelines but hard to achieve in practice

I have placed accounts where a mother did not produce a counter discourse to intensive mothering (as the third group below did), but who positioned their mothering performance and capacities as not matching the standards of intensive mothering. One of the implications of the ideology of intensive mothering is that mothers become (as well as fathers) responsible for their child’s development. The centrality of motherhood involving responsibilities for the day to day care and long-term developmental needs of children meant that it was extremely risky to one’s *moral identity* to voice doubt or difficulty in meeting children needs. The risk was one of being judged as a failing mum, an unwilling mum, a selfish adult or irresponsible mum. Essentially, one risked the judgement of being a 'bad' mother and intentionally then placing your child’s development and wellbeing at risk. Table 5.2 below indicates some of the ways nine of the women positioned their performance in relation to a discourse of intensive mothering (variously constructed by the mothers and recognised as opinions that were ‘out there’). Many of the women demonstrated complex processes of positioning their maternal performance in relation to social expectations. The implications of not meeting these expectations were further complex positionings around one’s moral identity, sources of discrimination / powerlessness and claims of mothers’ needs.

Respondent	Meeting the standards of intensive mothering? Sources of concern:
Mandy	Guilty feelings around not providing enough one to one attention to my child; Being a ‘selfish’ person;
Melissa	Difficulty in providing one – to – one attention in relation to my child’s needs for attention;

Cath	Being 'selfish'; Lack of enjoyment from child-caring;
Mary	Putting my career aspirations before my children's emotional needs; Anxiety about their welfare; Feeling guilty about mothering;
Danni	Feeling guilty about mothering; Tiredness; Feeling constrained by child-care;
Lauren	Do my children suffer because I work?
Janet	Balancing paid work with child-caring issues; Guilt about working;
Maria	Guilt around taking up paid work;
Rasheene	Unable to care;

Rasheene's account came the closest to voicing an account of distancing herself from maternal responsibilities. She claimed that she was not the person to care for her children. Her account of being a mother makes sense in the context of her life where her pregnancy and general social relations / actions seemed highly controlled by her family which she put down to their cultural traditions. As noted in chapter 4, Rasheene felt extremely powerless when she lived with her husband. Overall her agency had been greatly constrained through the patriarchal nature of her particular family relations. She left school to work in a local shop where her wages went straight into her father's bank account. Her marriage was also arranged by her parents. Rasheene introduces some of these themes at the beginning of the interview, where I learnt that she is also fleeing domestic violence:

".. I am fleeing domestic violence. And I came to Otterworth for refuge.

So I had an arranged marriage and then I had to come back to start work because I had to collect up enough money for him to get a visa. So I started working and went back to Pakistan. I went back there and then I got pregnant with my older daughter. Then came back here, had her in England and then carried on working.

I was still working and he hadn't got entry to England. Went back again, got pregnant again. Came back had another one. So it carried on and now I have four children. On my third child, my husband got entry." (Rasheene, 28, Asian working class woman)

The extended family and community in Asian families can provide a meaningful source of belonging and support but Rasheene stressed the controlling and patriarchal nature of her family relations. Her husband's and parents' reactions to her claims of domestic violence did not validate her experiences. She describes how her parents rejected the idea of domestic violence and told her to remain with her husband as this was her duty. She felt they were more concerned about the shame she would bring to her family by claiming her husband had been violent to her:

"My family when I phone them they are pressurising me. They say we are old you are supposed to be looking after us. In Asian families the daughters look after the mother and father. You know you shouldn't have done this you have brought shame to this family. People are talking, you have run off with someone. You know. We can't show our face in the community. Which isn't right. She doesn't.. they don't face the consequences of why I left. They think it as the right thing for him to do. They were right living next door, when he used to. At one point it got to the stage, where she knew I'd report him or if they saw any bruising on me they'd, to save him, she would stand in front of me to take the bruises. She was black and blue, so I wouldn't show the police anything. So she took his side most of the time."

H: "Do you think that is common?"

"In our culture it is right for the man to hit the woman. It happens a lot but most Asians don't come out with it. They think it is fine, men do that. But you know it is horrible. And now they are putting pressure on me, 'why don't you visit us, no-one is stopping you' (Rasheene, 27, Asian working class mother)

The extent to which Rasheene's experiences are common would need to be investigated in further research. This research cannot make claims about the typicality of this example. However, Rasheene centres her cultural background as formative in shaping her family relations, experiences and the social expectations associated with being a wife, a daughter and a mother. Rasheene's view of being a mother is one characterised by an expectation that her parents (her mother) will look after the children while she works to add income to her husband's wage. Moreover, Rasheene may not just see her mother as more

responsible for her children but she sees her as more competent and experienced in caring for her children:

"I have had them since. And I don't know how to cope with them because I have never had to look after them before. I am having parenting courses. It is hard, because I have never done this before. I have mostly been on my own. If I am watching telly, I'll watch telly because my mum would look after them. She would take them to school, pick them up. Give them something to eat, get them to bed, wake them up in the morning. I was just cooking and cleaning.

I haven't got a life of my own. I am thinking, Oh God I am just back in prison again. It is like just being at home." (Rasheene, 27, Asian working class woman)

"So I am with the kids and it is difficult."

H: *"Can you tell me more about that?"*

"The coping. The behaviour. You know manners, if they are naughty what do I do? What am I supposed to say? Bedtimes, if they are still talking what shall I do? Fighting, you know I can't cope. I just go upstairs to my room. If they come home from school, I don't sit with them .. I go upstairs. My daughter's 11, but she is quite mature for her age. They look after themselves. When I left she had most of the burden on her. She was looking after them. She still tells them what to do. And so it is like that. I still don't realise you have to look after them.

I dress them and bath them and everything else. It isn't like they are my children. It is like they are someone else's and I am just looking after them.

It is like I have no life of my own. No family support anymore. No friends. And um..." (Rasheene, 27, Asian working class woman)

Rasheene is voicing concern about her own needs over her children's needs and also a lack of capacity to look after her children and 'know' their needs. Her account is marked by a severe lack of choice over being a mother along with uncertainties about her capacities to mother (due to her lack of experience and due to a lack of support). Rasheene's account raises some pertinent issues. Although her account doesn't shift the central responsibility that families have for raising children, it provides a different context for gender relations as Rasheene's pregnancies and marriage (as well as her involvement in the labour market) were far from a private individual choice (Miller 1998).

Mandy also presented an account whereby she compared her mothering to social expectations to provide your child with attention and interact with them in a particular way:

"Yer, so and I kind of ..I ...I ...I didn't ..I discovered by this time that I wasn't a particularly good parent!!"

H: *"Right...what made you think that?"*

"Oh, I don't know. The thing is I am alright but the thing is that I read all these books that you sit down and you paint with your children, and I read to them and I read with them. And I taught them to read but I still think I didn't spend enough time, I still think that overall that I am a pretty selfish personality and it is kind of sort of what about me time? So I.. I mean.. they were fine. I was taken off the at risk register!! When Hilary was a year and it wasn't. I kind of felt that I kind of missed out because you know. I was sort of reigned in by my parents and then reigned in by this child." (Mandy, 35, white working class woman)

Mandy felt guilty about not in practice living up to the normative guidelines around providing attention and putting your children first:

"I have got this big guilt thing about not bringing her up very well, and going to work now, and not being with Cherry now. And so it is like failing two children you know. So I have this really big guilt thing. But at the end of the day I have always been on their side. I have always tried to help them in any way that I can." (Mandy, 35, white working class mother)

Mandy represents a commonly held view that as an adult one is responsible for oneself and as a parent one is responsible for the everyday care of children. However, Mandy also voices concerns about capacity to meet responsibilities and legitimate claims for help and support:

"I think to myself as an adult you make your bed and you lie in it. You know, this is it for me so fair enough OK. I made these mistakes, both of the children were planned. You know, yes I was stupid but it happens. For them, for their part I think it really awful that um..Hilary used to go to a sort of .. when I was married, my mother-in-law used to childmind for me and it used to be a nice little school, a village school. And the parents were really well off, you know. I used to see what the other children had and my heart used to break for her you know." (Mandy, 36, white working class woman)

"But from their point of view they are thrust into a world not of their making. The thing is that there seems to be quite a high drug and alcohol abuse thing,

because there is unemployment and social pressure and everything. And you know, especially round this estate. The kids round here. You know, they have no motivation and they are about to build a skateboarding park and you know. Yer OK, that's nice but I don't think it goes far enough. The kids need something more than just recreational. They are lost a lot of them.. They can't even read and write. What a failure that is. I mean, again I know coming from parents from the war and a school of 42 where you still had to stand up and recite your tables. Everybody learnt how to read and write and there were very few people who didn't. And they were kind of kept back by their parents you know. And now there is the attitude, well it never did me no harm you know....And where is the country's natural resource if it is not the children and good education for them? I think there should be more after school clubs and breakfast clubs and you know.

Which kind of means other people have to take responsibility for your children which I don't totally agree with. I think you ultimately are the most responsible for your children but you know so many people seem to need help with this. If it wasn't for the extended family thing you might not need so much in the way of parenting classes because there would be other people that you could turn to. There would be other children around." (Mandy, 36, working class woman)

Mandy is also claiming that mothers' capacity to meet socially acceptable standards of mothering were constrained by resources. Mandy along with several of the women were stressing their difficulties in relation to their perceptions of social standards for mothering. They were not constructing an account of unwilling mothers, but as constrained by incompetence, lack of resources, difficulties in balancing paid work with motherhood or the extensiveness of mothering as labour. While Rasheene and Mandy (along with at least six other women) were individualising their expressed lack of competence to mother, Janet, Mary, Marie and Lauren emphasised their social conditions in attempting to balance paid work with mothering as a cause of not meeting socially acceptable standards. This issue will be raised in the following chapter about the relationship between paid work and lone motherhood.

Placing limits and boundaries around maternal responsibilities and interference in children's development as a set of normative guidelines and practice.

Another set of representations of maternal identity and practices was that of producing a counter discourse to intensive directive mothering. I have called this

representation a counter discourse as the women presented their accounts as different from a perceived norm of children’s dependency on mothers. The social construction of intensive mothering was recognised but these women claimed to be *doing motherhood differently* and to having different motivations and values. The central feature of this view of mothering was to provide an image of the child as agent. As discussed earlier, this image of the child involves placing the process of self-determination at the heart of one’s maternal practices. Table 5.3 below illustrates aspects of this counter discourse in the data as it occurred in six of the accounts.

Table 5.3 Images of the child as agent

Respondent	Feature of counter discourses
Nina	Children can cope and manage their own reactions to their social worlds rather than need protection from risks / danger; There are limits on mothers’ capacity to control their children;
Emily	Children can cope and manage their own reactions to their social worlds rather than need protection from risks / danger; Children are self-directing;
Beverley	Children can choose their activities and whether they want to be with their mother;
Justine	Mothers need to place boundaries around their child’s dependence so that they learn to be self-reliant;
Patricia	Mothers need to place boundaries around their child’s dependence so that they learn to be self-reliant;
Denise	Maternal dependency can be harmful to children and mothers.

Nicola and Estelle positioned their maternal practices and values as oppositional to ideas of children’s needs for protection and guidance. Interestingly, I felt uncomfortable about their views on mothering (which reflects my assumptions and values). Nicola and Estelle in various ways claimed that they were not responsible for their child’s development in the same way that others did. Both of these women were students, had one pre-school age child, and were in their early twenties. Nicola commented on how she took her daughter with her to the

student bar during the day. She resisted the idea that she should arrange her life around children's spaces and activities:

"Chloe likes to come with me. I take her everywhere, she is used to blending in to what I am doing. She comes to the pub with me, to university. She is free to do what she wants really, I don't see why I should look after her and watch her all the time." (Nicola, 22, white working class woman).

Justine and Patricia discuss their values around wanting their children to express their independence. This was in terms of their intentions to nurture this independence in their children - which does suggest an overlap with the child as 'project' image of the child. However, Justine also comments on encouraging her children to make their own decisions. Justine positions her practices as an alternative to the view that mothers should put their children's needs first:

"Instead of worrying am I doing the right thing? Am I bringing up my children right? Do they have enough clothes? Do they eat well? Are they eating a balanced diet? Not important, not really. Just as long as a child eats three meals a day, the occasional snack. If I was home and I wasn't doing courses I could keep my house as clean as pin. My children would eat healthy food, but they would be really miserable. I would be too constricted in doing it that way. I'd rather do courses for me so I know I am getting some sort of personal achievement, my children know I am doing something for me, and that I have to study which sets an example for them. They don't overburden me with their problems, which then helps them deal with the silly little problems. And if they need help, they know I am there. I get my 11 year old asking me if I want help with homework. That's mature thinking. It's a good thing too. They can sort things out themselves. It's a sort of balance." (Justine, 27, white working class woman)

There are many issues raised here. Justine is considering her participation in adult education classes that leads her to be out of the house during the day. Her perception of intensive mothering is very home based. But she is presenting an alternative image of the child and the relationship between maternal responsibilities and children's needs.

Patricia provides another example of stressing independence over needs for her child. Patricia has a child with Downs Syndrome, who is fourteen but, as Patricia says has the mental capacity akin to a five year old. In this context Patricia positions her mothering practice as developing her child's independence

not only in the sense of breaking down her child's dependency on her as a mother but in the context of perceptions of lifelong dependency and care needs for special needs children. Patricia talks about her maternal practices and values:

"I think single parents can become too isolated..I think women who're married or in relationships get the same problem. My friend who has been over today has built her whole life around her children. Which is like, well she is ten years younger than I am but her children are a little bit younger than he is. I can see the mistakes she is making I made all those years ago. And I've gone past that now. You get to the point where you start to become selfish, for yourself and you need to make starting a life for yourself. And it is better for the kids. I have another friend who has a child with Downs, she is making her son independent. I can see where she is going with it. I am trying to follow her footsteps if you like." (Patricia,34, white working class woman).

Patricia is claiming a 'self beyond motherhood' which she relates to her choice of taking up paid work (see next chapter).

Conclusion:

Mothers appeared to position their maternal practices and values in relation to a discourse of intensive mothering and maternal responsibilities. The concern with the 'proper thing to do' and moral reasoning have been raised in many studies relating to maternal practices and values. Edwards and Duncan have called these negotiations 'gendered moral rationalities', while Ribbens-McCarthy, Edwards and Gillies (2000) discussed the 'moral imperative' and non-escapable responsibilities towards children (Edwards and Duncan 1999; Ribbens-McCarthy, Edwards and Gillies 2000).

From the discussion above, this data set supports the view that maternal understandings of their role significantly shapes accounts of their practices. However, there were many tensions between normative guidelines which relates to Finch and Mason's argument of the need for values and principles to be worked out and negotiated (Finch and Mason 1993). One area of tension was between controlling children through monitoring their behaviour and providing guidance / discipline against notions of togetherness, harmony and unity. Another tension was between 'being there' and the demanding labour / work needed to sustain this availability and attentiveness.

Their practices are also shaped by their social context, which involves negotiating expectations for intensive mothering in relation to their social networks, resources and capacities. While maternal responsibility implies duties and authority, actual lived relationships and the demands of intensive mothering as 'good mothering' involves a negotiation with people and context. The normative guidelines of meeting children's needs and children's dependency on parents acted as powerful forces for maternal practices but some also positioned their values as in opposition to this discourse. Central were images of the child. The complex negotiation between values, social expectations, agency positionings and resources forms some of the key processes in how lone mothers managed these aspects of motherhood. In the next chapter I will examine how these negotiations and values shaped labour market participation.

Chapter Six

Negotiating Lone Motherhood and Paid Work

Introduction:

Taking up or sustaining paid work involved a complex negotiation between values, resources and identities for many of the mothers. In this chapter, I will argue that positionings around intensive mothering, meanings around lone motherhood and the negotiation between resources and opportunities were key in shaping lone mothers actions as paid workers. To explore these issues I will apply Duncan and Edwards notion of 'gendered moral rationalities' and maternal identity as primarily mother, primarily worker or mother / integral (Duncan and Edwards 1999). These concepts were discussed in Chapter 1. 'Gendered moral rationalities' refers to ideas about the proper thing to do as a mother which is socially negotiated and locally varied. Gendered moral rationalities offer normative guidelines in what the proper relationship between paid work and motherhood is. The categories of primary mother, primary worker and mother / worker integral relate to the identity formations among mothers. Duncan and Edwards found in their study of lone mothers, and further studies of partnered mothers, that a mother's identity can rest on notions of prioritising one's role as a full-time mother, negotiating between aspirations as a mother and a paid worker or coherently connecting together paid work and caring as central but integrated maternal responsibilities towards children.

These positions offer different perspectives of notions of 'good motherhood'. The primary mother position views good motherhood as akin to forms of intensive mothering discussed earlier. A good mother stays at home to care for the children rather than take up paid work. The primary worker position is where a woman sees herself as more a worker than a mother. In this position a mother has to negotiate her separate identities as a worker and mother. Paid work is not seen as totally beneficial to her children's needs which are more defined along the lines of needing your mother there. The mother / worker integral position is where a mother sees undertaking paid work and caring as dual responsibilities and both beneficial to children. Duncan and Edwards argued that localities, neighbourhoods and social groups based on class or ethnicity vary in the

dominant view of the relationship between paid work and motherhood (Duncan and Edwards 1999; Duncan et al 2003).

In this study, the gendered moral rationality position did seem significant in shaping a lone mother's labour market activities. Values were also shaped by perceptions of material needs and local opportunities. Some of the women centred their values, others centred material needs, while others centred local opportunities as key motivating factors.

The diagram below illustrates the number of respondents according to the maternal identities in relation to paid work modifying Duncan and Edwards' categories. Although Duncan and Edwards make the point that a primary mother identity allows for part-time work that fits around the children, I have separated this position into primary mother – no paid work / primary mother – part-time work. This is because many of the women stressed their commitment to paid work but this activity had to fit around their children's school hours / nursery hours. They were uncertain if full-time work was in children's best interests. However, some also positioned themselves as not committed to paid work whether this was part-time or full-time. Further I have split the category of primary worker position into a mother / worker separate position or a primary worker position. This is because according to this data set, a mother seemed to find a meaningful identity as a paid worker and a mother as either a source of conflict between paid work / motherhood (in contrast to the mother / worker integral position that claims these roles are complimentary) while others stressed their worker identity above that of 'mother'.

Table 6.1: Number of respondents according to the proper thing to do in relation to balancing motherhood with paid work:

Primarily mother – no paid work	6
Primarily mother – part-time work	17
Mother / worker integral	7
Mother / worker separate	11
Primarily worker	2
Total:	43

As Duncan and Edwards also point out, these configurations relate to women's understandings about the proper relationship between paid work and motherhood rather than describing their actual labour market participation. As the discussion below suggests, the gendered moral rationality position taken by a woman is often in conflict with material needs or labour market opportunities so that a gap between intentions, preferences and actual actions emerges. The issue of whether actions are determined by values or material needs is therefore a complex one. In the discussion below it is hard to distinguish between these factors, and they also do not seem to act alone. Direct causal connections are of course not possible from this research design. However, the complexity of negotiating your involvement in the labour market when one has childcare responsibilities is clearly demonstrated. The issues for mothers themselves will now be examined according to this gendered moral rationality positioning.

Primarily mother – no paid work:

Six of the mothers presented explicit values and normative guidelines that good mothering involves not taking up paid work. However, their motivations for this view varied as well as their circumstances.

Sue felt it was her role to look after her children. She felt that her secure financial position placed her in the lucky position of not having to work:

H: "So you stayed at home with ..?"

"Yer."

H: "All of them?"

"Yer."

H: "And you were happy with that?"

"Yes. Most of the time. I need a break from it a bit more but otherwise. I didn't have them to go off and ..I don't see the point of having kids and giving them to others to look after.."

H: "No."

"Obviously if money was different. And I had to work then that would be different. But I don't have to, I have enough funds coming in." (Sue, 38, white middle class woman)

Hazel, as we saw earlier put forward a view that she wants to look after her children full-time so that she can make sure they maintain their education and receive good mothering. As a Black Afro-Caribbean woman, Hazel may feel more strongly about her sons receiving a good education. But Hazel also relates this to her own unsatisfactory childhood which she does not want to 'repeat'. Cath, also an Afro-Caribbean woman, provides an interesting example of the local negotiation of gendered moral rationalities. She had experienced a bereavement when her ex-partner committed suicide. She had wanted to stay at home with her children during this time (she worked part-time previously). But after a year her daughters were encouraging her to take up paid work. Cath had four children, one aged 5 and the others were teenagers. As a consequence she took up a local adult education course as she wanted to be at home for her younger daughter:

"I was doing nothing at home. Cleaning when there was nothing to clean. But I didn't want to work. I couldn't cope with it and I had the little one to think about. But the girls they kept pestering and it was them that got me here [at the education centre]" (Cath, 42, Afro-Caribbean working class woman).

Susan and Maria had both worked full-time before they had children. Susan was a trained metallurgist, and Maria a midwife. However, both preferred to look after their children full-time, holding views in line with intensive mothering, as the example from Susan illustrates:

"I worked from leaving school. I was never out of work. I walked out of a lot of jobs but I went into another one. And that's another one that makes me cross, is people's image of lone parents is that you came straight from school and got yourself pregnant so that you can get yourself a house. You are all tarred with the same brush. Which I think... I am a trained metallurgist by trade. Aircraft materials. What people don't realise is there is a past before you had children. It was my choice to have Nina, to give up work. That's why I waited until I was 26" (Susan, 38, white working class woman)

For Susan and Maria, paid work was separate from motherhood and they were delaying returning to work until their children were over 16. It was this preference expressed strongly as a set of values around good mothering and in their children's interest that distinguishes this view of the relationship between paid work and motherhood. However, children themselves can disagree and sufficient financial resources may be needed to put this into practice.

Primarily mother – part-time worker:

This next position on the proper relationship between paid work and motherhood involved commitments to fit work around the children. Meeting children's needs through being there and being available for your children was stressed but when children reached school age this allowed for part-time work. These mothers tended to say that they were in principle not prepared to work full-time, while they had children living at home with them. I have placed sixteen of the women into this category. However, it is essential not to see these positions as clear-cut fixed or permanent categories. They are essentially gendered moral *rationalities*, which stresses the way they are a point of view which of course can be subject to shifts, negotiated and dynamic. Mothers' values have a dynamic relationship to context, rather than a one-dimensional one.

Sarah explicitly states she is unavailable for work when her daughter is out of school. She feels especially strongly about this as her daughter goes to stay at her father's house every weekend. Sarah talks at length about her sense of time with her daughter as precious:

"The main issue now is I want to go to work, I want to earn my own money and get off benefits, get out of the benefits trap but I am also really really clear, and you can understand, in my circumstances, I cannot work 9-5 or 9-6, I am not going to sacrifice those hours between 4-9 with Annabel as she goes away at

weekends. If I did that I wouldn't see her. I wouldn't be a mother. And our relationship would suffer It is only 9.30 -3 that I am free. That is the time I am free to earn money, do something for myself." (Sarah, 32, white working class mother)

However, Sarah also demonstrates the possible shifts in gendered moral rationalities and the context dependent nature of mothers' values. While her daughter was nursery age, with the possibility of full-day care, Sarah did take up paid work. But she found it hard to manage the motherhood with full-time paid work. She felt her health suffered:

"And then I was with her for a year and then I worked full-time for two years, which was really really stressful. ...I was working and just trying to get to the nursery on time and that was for two years. So then I thought right I have to chillout for a year and do nothing...So it was all or nothing. Then I did a postgraduate...Oh, it was really really difficult. I mean it was a really good time in my life, in loads of ways. It was the only time since becoming a single parent that I was supporting myself. Your self-esteem goes way up there when you are supporting yourself. I was earning money. I wasn't on benefits, I was paying everything myself, I was meeting people, I was being creative, I was enjoying what I was doing. You know. But the downside was, I was the only single parent where I worked, in fact I was the only parent. So I felt really marginalised. I had major major deadlines where it was very very difficult for me to get everything done and get to the nursery by 5.45. The times they threatened to not let Annabel come anymore or charge me. Because I was always five minutes or ten minutes late. It got to the point where I was always in tears. I felt so torn. I was just really knackered. Looking back I don't know how I had done it because I am always stressed out and knackered now and I am not even working. I think, how did I do those two years?" (Sarah, 32, white working class woman)

This account suggests that Sarah previously held views that were akin to the mother / worker separate gendered moral rationality set out below. Here experiences of full-time work, as well as her lack of childcare once her daughter started school led her to reassess her values.

Trisha as we saw earlier had valued the idea of 'being there' for her children. This was for similar reasons to those given by Hazel. She felt the her role involved being present with her children, to protect them from deviant behaviour, maintain a close relationship and monitor their behaviour. She particularly felt strongly about being at home in the after school hours. However, in line with many of the womens' accounts, Trisha decided to take up part-time work when her children all reached school age. Her reasons for taking up paid work were to

have something to do while the children were at school. Trisha describes her experiences and motivations:

H: *"And have you had contact with the New Deal at all?"*

"I had an interview and we left that.. once I was ready to get a job I would contact them. And sort it all out there and then. If it stays at it is, that it is when I am ready to get a job I will be quite happy. If they start changing things so that they tell me when to get a new job then... She was saying how they give you a grant when you first start work. How they pay housing benefit for the first month. Cos that was my problem. I went and got a job, at the school working in the kitchen and straight away I was in debt with my rent because I didn't get paid for the first six weeks. So I ended up paying all this rent."

H: *"Did you get out of debt?"*

"Not until I got back on social. Then they took so much off per week. I only did it to get out of the house. I was going mad just sitting here all day doing nothing. I found I was getting the kids to school, coming back and going to sleep or sat watching telly all day. I had to do something to get out of the house." (Trisha, 38, white working class woman)

Trisha is committed to paid work and would like to increase her family income. But she is committed to part-time work. However, she has a view, reinforced by this experience, that part-time is risky financially. Rather than take up part-time work, Trisha stresses that she is still being productive through volunteer work with victims of domestic violence and undertaking training. At present, although she is aware of the welfare reforms under New Labour, such as the housing benefit run-on system, she is not convinced part-time work will provide her with enough income security.

Many others described 'barriers' to taking up the part-time work that could fit around the children that they preferred. Geeta had also taken up a job at her daughter's school but likewise had not been paid for several weeks, and had to return to Income Support due to rent arrears. Lea had taken up part-time cleaning at the local community centre. She was able to work her hours in a flexible way and take her three year old daughter along with her. However, Lea had to leave this job for financial reasons as her ex-husband withdrew his maintenance and she was better off returning to Income Support than working

eight hours a week with additional benefits. Again the cost of her rent was hard to cover without full housing benefit.

Some of the mothers negotiated their part-time work in resourceful ways so that they could be with their children as much as possible. Kimberley had undertaken night work in order to work as well as look after her children during the day, when she was in a cohabiting relationship:

"Yea, I'd like to work. I was a bar manager for two and a half years. ...It was excellent, because by the time I was going to work the kids would be settling down for bed so they didn't miss me. My partner would get in in time for me to go in. And I slept during the day while they were at school. So you know, in that sense I used to work and get my night off at weekends. Go out on my night off at weekends. So you know, he was quite happy to go to work all day and come home and have a few beers and watch TV. So as he was coming in, I was going out." (Kimberley, 27, white working class woman)

Kimberley enjoyed this paid work and she was able to fulfil her maternal responsibilities. However, when her partner moved out, she lost her source of informal childcare and had to give up her job. She felt that childcare for her five children would cost too much but she also wanted someone to look after them at home during the night rather than take up paid work in daytime hours. As a woman living alone with her children and without reliable informal childcare, Kim provides extra income for the family through cash-in-hand part-time work that she can do at home in the evenings.

Several other mothers worked in local settings that were child-orientated. Two of the family centres provided part-time work for five of the women in this study. This type of paid work involved cooking in the centre café. These mothers valued the extra income and had taken up the paid work as they became regular attenders at the centre. This employment was particularly flexible and allowed them to earn under the £15 a week earnings disregard (at this time in 2000 the ceiling for earnings before it affected your Income Support claim was £15). Estelle worked as a play worker with hours to fit round the school day. Lucinda and Heather also worked school hours. Both of these women received the Working Families Tax Credit and commented on how this income supplement

improved their income. Lucinda's day is closely structured around her children's school day:

"Um, drop her at school. We walk by ourselves. I'd then go and get the bus into town which gets me there a bit earlier cos it doesn't start till ten. I can't say I'll start at half nine, because I have to take my daughter to school. I work in a shop. Go in and have something to eat. Start work. Finish at two. Go and get the bus up to the school. I normally get there with quarter of an hour to spare. So I pick her up and we might say walk to Tesco's if we have got some shopping to do. Go home. We wouldn't, we don't normally have that many visitors, we don't go out that many places so we just do her homework, or she might watch telly or play with the neighbours' kids or whatever." (Lucinda, 27, white working class woman)

Lucinda commented in the after interview questionnaire that she felt her self-esteem was higher since she had taken up part-time work, as it gave her something to do while her daughter was at school.

Christine gave an account of taking up temporary full-time work in order to earn some extra money for Christmas. However, she decided not to take up full-time again the next year as she had experienced this employment as stressful and it had affected her mothering. Christine's values in relation to good mothering, and her primary identity as a mother led her to prefer part-time paid work and find full-time paid work stressful. However, the material context of her class position, neighbourhood, low paid working conditions and lack of autonomy to flexibly balance paid work with her preference to be at home after school, were also factors shaping her experience. Further, Christine's perceptions of her locality as risky for teenagers reinforced the significance of intensive mothering for her as a mother. Had Christine been able to balance her responsibilities with full-time paid work through working at home or other forms of flexibility, or if her income had been higher it is uncertain if Christine would have taken up full-time work. This experience seems to have put her off.

Some of the women were able to secure part-time paid work that could flexibly fit around their children. Tamara had set up her own catering company that she managed around her children. She aimed to spend as much time with her children as possible and felt 'lucky' that her husband was paying maintenance so that she

didn't 'have to' work. However, Tamara still wanted to try to save a bit of extra money and have another interest alongside the children so she set up her business which worked on a 'very part-time basis'.

Overall, the insecurity of part-time paid work was highlighted to a great extent by these women. A lack of flexible hours, childcare and low pay were highlighted as major constraints in fitting part-time work around school hours or benefiting financially from part-time paid work. However, these mothers tended to prefer not to work full-time due to their view of 'good mothering' and the situated needs of their children in relation to their social / individual contexts.

Mother / Worker Integral:

This position claims that mothers taking up paid work is morally correct since it is as important to children's needs and development as caring. Beverley, who works full-time as a training manager and travels for an hour to work and back everyday, provided a good example of this view of the relationship between paid work and motherhood. Beverley discussed the difficulties in maintaining her paid work position as one of finding acceptable childcare as a major issue in balancing full-time paid work with motherhood. She had tried many childminders before moving her children to the after school club when their school opened one:

"I had just started my job. And I had just moved to here so that I could be closer to the job for travelling and stuff. And they had been with her about - this was in August I started the job and this was about November time that I was going to the point where I thought I can't leave them with this woman. I had rung round a bunch of other people. There was nobody else, no other childminders who could take them. Um and I was seriously considering giving up work because I had no option. And then amazingly the school opened up an after school club in January. And they did it really quick and I moved them to there straight away. And it was such a relief because it meant I didn't have to give up my job and if it wasn't for that I wouldn't be working now. Because there just wasn't people around here who could do it. If they are pre-school then you need somebody to look after them all day. It is easier to find childcare because childminders are more keen to look after them all day, you know for a stretch, a half day or a whole day.

But when they are at school you have the problem of dropping them off at school and picking them up afterwards until you get back from work and that's a real

pain. Because it is bitty and it involves walking kids backwards and forwards places. And if a childminder has their own kids at different schools and things who may well be at different schools then it is horrendous.” (Beverley, 33, white middle class woman)

Beverley prefers after school clubs because they are more beneficial for her children and more reliable for her:

“I prefer after school clubs and nurseries and places like that. Because you will have a group of people there, it will be organised and properly inspected and so on. And you can go there and see what it is like and what activities are going on and it is set up for a specific job you know. And then if one member of staff is off sick it doesn't affect the fact that you know your kids can't go. It is more you can go on and ask the kids what they can do and there is more activities and so on. So I prefer that kind of set up than the childminder set up....I mean at the end of the day if they were coming home they wouldn't have half those activities they have got. If they were with a childminder they certainly wouldn't have that sort of, all those things to choose from to do and they would probably be in the house a whole lot more, the fact that they have got this big playground to run around in is fantastic.” (Beverley, 33, white middle class woman)

However, with a change of job Beverley has a new childcare problem:

“It is the same job but a lot more money. And so it will be better opportunities. It is like a fifty per cent increase in salary so I mean you know. I have got to the point where I was working where it was either stay where I was essentially for several years because there was no openings or look for something else so I looked for something else. But that causes a problem because the after school club finishes at five thirty so now I am back to sort of what am I going to do for that last half hour. And I asked the after school club if they would consider opening later and they won't. Basically because they are staffed by school helpers. They are paid but they you know tend to be middle aged women who sort are just doing it for a bit of pin money but they have their own family lives and they need to be back by six o'clock to make tea and do you know what I mean. So they are not keen to open it later. And um you know I am back to the childminding problem. So what I have ended up doing is getting a babysitter, a teenager, a young girl. She picks them up, we have been trialing it for a couple of weeks. And that seems to be OK. But she picks them up and brings them back here and looks after them for an hour a day. And I pay her for that hour a day. So touch wood it is working OK. But if she is sick or whatever then.” (Beverley, 33, white middle class woman)

She finds her new employer does not understand working mothers' need for flexibility without losing out on pay / status:

“It depends on your employers, the council was fantastic, it was really geared up

to um to working parents. There was specific allowances to enable you to take time off if your kids were sick, it was not a problem. Whereas where I work at the moment it is at the discretion of your manager. It has been a case of, I mean I have hardly had any time off luckily but it has been a case of well you know, sort of make the time up. So I have worked through lunch hours and so on. To make the time up and I think if it did occur more than once in a while well then we will take your time out of your leave.” (Beverley, 33, white middle class woman)

Beverley felt her children’s teacher expressed a view that mothers should not work full-time. In the following extract Beverley was defending her employment participation and use of the before school and after school club, along with her moral identity as a good mother:

“That’s it, so that was very frustrating. To some extent you always face attitudes of other people, you know for example at school, there is quite a few of the teachers that make little comments about the amount of time the children are spending at school and not with me because I am working. Oh it is a very long day for them isn’t it? And the Head Teacher said to Lilly, Oh you are the first person I see in the morning and the last person I see at night! And then there was an incident with a load of teachers sort of last year, and she really didn’t get on with the teachers and the teacher was quite an old fashioned strict kind of teacher and she was very very unhappy and so I had a meeting with the teacher, and you know I brought up a lot of the things Lilly had said. Oh she had called me stupid and she said this and that. You know I brought up a lot of these issues and she said I think Lilly is finding it very hard to be away from you most of the time.

You know, look this is nothing new, she is used to being sort of you know. She is not used to me dropping her off at 9 and picking her up at 3, she never has been, and she has been really happy at school up till now. And she said Lilly said to me Oh I wish my mummy could pick me up from school like it was this big issue you know. Yer all time times kids say that but it is not like a huge issue like she is desperately unhappy. And Oh well it is such a long day, she probably gets very tired and you know.” (Beverley, 33, white middle class woman)

Although Beverley held the mother / worker integral gendered moral rationality that viewed paid work and motherhood as complimentary and in children’s interests (because childcare was valued highly along with providing a decent income), she still had to negotiate her employment position in relation to local childcare opportunities and paid work opportunities. Further, her labour market participation as a full-time worker was a source of concern to others, which she had to defend. Beverley is positioned by her children’s teacher as a different type of mother.

Patricia, Melissa, Kathleen, Amanda and Janet also felt taking up full-time paid work was in their children's best interest. However, only Patricia, Kathleen and Janet could sustain full-time work, and even here, Patricia and Janet were experiencing childcare difficulties so that they were thinking of giving up work. Kathleen, on the other hand worked at home, facilitated through IT systems so that she could arrange her client-led local tour business while looking after her daughter. For Janet, full-time paid work offered a role model to her son and provided them with a decent income above part-time earnings. However, Janet not only had to convince her son of the benefits of full-time work, she experienced problems when he began not to go to school. Janet was reliant on her eight year son to take himself to school once she took on more hours at her work. Janet worked as a support worker. However, she experienced problems and was now considering giving up work. She describes these tensions below:

"I am still doing it now. I am working strange hours. Now I can say to Arthur, last year we went abroad on holiday. If we want this and if we want that then I have got to go to work. He is slowly coming round to that. He has noticed that we have had Sky TV. And there is things as well that we have got. That he can identify with his mates having. Cos most of his friends have still got two parents at home. So the difference between my working is exceptional but I had to really fight my guilt. And all these problems that come with responsibility because they are just mine. And when I do get problems with my youngest. Like when he was bunking off school, it's hard. It drove me nuts at times. It is like I have got to give up my job. It is the only way I can cope with this." (Janet, 45, white working class woman)

So although Janet valued full-time paid work and viewed paid work and motherhood as a complementary source of identity and set of activities, she experienced constraints in balancing the two. Her son also challenged the complementary nature of paid work and motherhood, positioning her mothering as different to the stay at home / part-time work norm.

Mother / Worker separate:

Duncan and Edwards (1999) demonstrated how, especially in the context of dominant white cultures, motherhood is viewed as being in conflict with paid work. This involves an interpretative view of good mothering where prioritising the maternal role, while being a good worker means prioritising one's paid work

commitments. It has also been the case that paid work and motherhood are organised in such a way that women find a lack of institutional support in balancing paid work with motherhood (Lewis 1997; McRae 1999; Hakim 1996). This gendered moral rationality position demonstrates some of these tensions. Taking a mother / worker separate position is where a mother values both involvement in the labour market and intensive mothering but presents these activities as contradictory. It is almost as if motherhood and paid work is viewed in either / or terms rather than the mother / worker integral position where both activities are viewed as synonymous with children's needs. Eleven of the mothers seemed to struggle with conflicting priorities towards labour market participation and motherhood. In practice some of these mothers were in paid work, others were not. Those that were in work tended to either position their mothering in terms of not being able to achieve the intensive mothering ideal in practice (see previous chapter), or expressed guilt about working. Those that were not in paid employment felt constrained by being excluded from the labour market.

Lauren provides a good example of this position. She describes her reasons for taking up full-time paid work as revolving around her needs to participate in the labour market and the centrality of paid work to her adult identity:

"I am better off working though. It gives you the incentive to get up and go. It makes you feel like a human being again. If you are not working or studying, being unemployed - life is hell. You can easily get trapped into anything just to get a buzz or whatever. I have always worked. The longest I was unemployed was six months. That nearly killed me... Boredom, depression. You don't think it is going to happen to you. But it does. Everyone else is busy or doing something. You are busy with a family but it is not the same. There is no motivation there, you aren't meeting people. When you are working or studying life is totally different and people treat you differently. They don't talk down to you." (Lauren, 35, Afro-Caribbean woman)

For Lauren paid work offers a route to status and a socially appropriate identity. Paid work also involves independently providing towards the family income. However, Lauren centred the difficulties she had in balancing paid work with motherhood throughout her interview. She was aware of the recent benefit and welfare reforms, and had actually found her most recent job through the New

Deal Scheme. She supported the extra advice and in-work benefits in principle but found the extensive form filling extremely difficult to maintain:

"It is a good idea but to start off it is a struggle, to sort everything out, all the paperwork out. They give you four weeks extended on your housing benefit but not on your council tax, so that's no good. And the four weeks goes really quickly and you still have to sort out your paperwork by that time. You are running around like a headless chicken because different parts of the form are for different departments. And you are trying to work and take care of the children as well. It is finding the time to do it all!!! So it is hard. It works but it is tough. They say, you will get all this, but ...well, you are better off working because the security is there. You have a monthly income and you have more access to credit. You are beginning to get off the poverty line, buy yourself a little bit extra. It is still a lot of responsibility for a lone parent to be working full-time or part-time and looking after the kids. There is just not enough support. It is like childcare, they give you 70% towards that but it is not enough.." (Lauren, 35, Afro-Caribbean woman)

A lack of time to look after her children, maintain paperwork and participate in paid work was a common theme in these accounts where a mother was in paid work, especially in long part-time or full-time work. Lauren would have liked more financial support to be in work and more flexibility from her employer. These issues and claims for support will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Mandy also worked as a support worker at the same care home as Janet above. Mandy describes her life as improving once she started paid work. Mandy had her children young in her view, when she was twenty. She had fallen pregnant while in a causal relationship that ended before the end of her pregnancy. Mandy struggled with being 'reigned in by this child' and wanted to work as a nurse. However, her beliefs about intensive mothering led her to stay at home. When her daughter was eleven she took up paid work and is now earning £16 000 a year which she sees as a high wage. She has recently increased her hours to full-time. Mandy negotiated the decision to take up paid work with her two daughters. She describes the satisfaction she receives from her paid work and earning enough to get mortgage:

"Life is great now. I am working, I am buying the house. But before now it has been bad. ..Well, when I took on the mortgage, which I only did about four months ago um..I said ..cos I had been working up till then for about three years. I said that before that, I would have left any time if they had any problems and

before that I would have gone part-time if they had any problems. I sat them down and I said right.. Ok I want to buy the house. Ultimately because I smoke so heavily I'll snuff it quickly and you'll get it. So you know you should support me in this you know. Um I said it means that what ever happens that I have to stay at work. I don't have the safety lead to say you know that you need me here. It's a very very big thing so think about it and tell me what you feel about it but once I have done it, so they thought about it . And they said OK. Mainly because they will get the house I suspect!! So yer, that was that. So I had to and I can't. Whatever happens now I can't. I have saved two payments of my mortgage in a saving account just in case but you know, I am working now and I will be working for a long time." (Mandy, 35, white working class mother)

We saw in the previous chapter that Mandy felt she did not live up to the ideals of good mothering. One issue for Mandy was the way paid work could be a risk to your children's wellbeing as a mother is not there for them:

"I have go this big guilt thing about not bringing her up very well, and going to work now, and not being with Cherry now. And so it is like failing two children you know. So I have this really big guilt thing." (Mandy, 35, white working class woman)

Mandy makes the point again in the following extract:

"Have you got children?"

H: "Yer." M: "Yer? How old?"

H: "Four."

"Run screaming for the hills now...run!!!!...You need time off. You do. This is what I was always fighting against. You do. It does depend what sort of person you are. I knew someone who had four kids and I would class her as the person who was great, she was someone I would class as the perfect mum. She was home all the time and loved her kids. Absolutely, nothing stressed her out. Got one in one hand, feeding another. Sort of like painting a picture with the other hand. Me, I'd lock myself in the bathroom and run myself a long bath and think Oh God!! She was really good. But maybe too traditional. I really did think they are going to grow up loved and knowing that they are really secure. And everything. Here it is like where's Mum? Oh she is working late!!" (Mandy, 35, white working class mother)

The mother / worker separate moral rationality generated many tensions for the women. Good mothering was allied to intensive mothering while they also acknowledged a source of identity from paid work. Further, their position in

relation to the labour market and the institutional support in terms of in-work benefits, employer support and childcare greatly shaped their experience and capacities to balance these aspirations.

Primarily Worker:

This gendered moral rationality relates to the expression of a paid worker identity seeming more significant to a mother than that of mothering. Rasheene and Nicola seemed to present this position. As we saw Rasheene had experienced domestic violence and a route into motherhood that had been highly controlled by her family. In this context Rasheene wanted to have autonomy to live her life as an individual adult. She voiced this in ways that many mothers would have found difficult as she explicitly rejects her mothering role:

"I have had them since... And I don't know how to cope with them because I have never had to look after them before.. I am having parenting courses. It is hard, because I have never done this before. I have mostly been on my own. If I am watching telly, I'll watch telly because my mum would look after them. He would take them to school, pick them up. Give them something to eat, get them to bed, wake them up in the morning. I was just cooking and cleaning...I haven't got a life of my own. I am thinking, Oh God I am just back in prison again...It is like they are someone else's and I am just looking after them....It is like I have no life of my own. No family support anymore. No friends. And um ..Sometimes I feel I can't cope. It is so difficult. I just need to get out. And, you know, sometimes I think I will just walk out and not come back. I just don't know what to do..I think go, leave. It was bliss when I didn't have the kids with me, when I was in the one bedroom flat, I had my own life." (Rasheene, 27, Asian working class woman)

These concerns about motherhood as a source of imprisonment make sense in relation to Rasheene's experiences of becoming a mother. Paid work was also represented as a key feature of her 'good' life as an individual when she lived in the one bedroom flat after first fleeing domestic violence without her children.

Conclusion:

In this discussion of the gendered moral rationalities around motherhood and paid work according to the respondents in this study I have demonstrated the dynamic nature of values and the role of institutional arrangements in supporting or constraining a mother's paid work aspirations. The majority of the women

either worked part-time in insecure employment or held the mother / worker separate rationality which produced anxieties around being a bad mother if one was in employment. Either way negotiating between paid work and motherhood was extremely complex. The final data findings chapter that follows brings together issues of social support. Many of the women expressed support needs but accessing and negotiating support was morally and practically risky.

Chapter Seven

Negotiating Social Support

Introduction:

This chapter will examine the significance and meanings of social support within these accounts of mothering. I will focus on the patterns of receiving social support for caring and providing for children rather than the giving of support which these mothers were involved in. A number of themes emerged which exemplify the inter-connections between the ideology of intensive mothering, moral identity and the negotiation of values in situated contexts. Again while there is much variety at an individual level, a number of common themes emerge. In many of the accounts we can see a similar range of contradictions, complexities and constraints to negotiating support as a mother living alone and mothering alone. The overall picture of these women's experiences is one of complexity as their accounts demonstrate the dynamic relationship between discourses, values, agency, resources and experiences.

The discussion begins by taking an overview of the expressed sources of, and needs for support. Following this brief overview of the data, I will then go on to assess the meanings and practices around accessing financial, childcare and other sources of support. The discussion has been organised this way due to some fundamental differences between different spheres of support that illustrate the construction and negotiation of normative guidelines around support for mothering. Receiving support from either one's extended family, friends, child's father or public bodies held different meanings and were negotiated in relation to resources and constructions of 'normal' and 'acceptable' levels of support.

Types and sources of social support:

Here I will look at the type and providers of support that the mothers reported as significant in their family lives. Some of the support they received such as by family members or financially from the state was often taken for granted and not raised as an issue of support. Examples of definitions of 'support' will be discussed later. However, I have included all individuals who are cited as being involved in family life as sources of support although whether the mothers

themselves also saw these relationships as ‘supportive’ ones is an avenue for additional inquiry.

The mothers in this study had many support strategies in place. The table below offers an overview of the main types and providers of social support that this data set exemplifies. Most of the mothers ‘packaged’ their financial and childcare support from a range of sources:

Table 7.1: Types and sources of support

Type of support	No of participants receiving support by provider
Financial	Government support (31) (= Income Support (21) Working Families Tax Credit (7) Maternity Benefit (1) Disability (1) Widows benefits (1)) Maintenance from child’s father (14) (= regular maintenance (11)) Support from family (7) Charities (2) Self-supporting (5)
Childcare	Friends (17) Parents (15) and siblings (8) Child’s father (13) Private childcare (11) Older children (6)
Help with decision making / Advice / Someone to talk to	Family (14) Child’s father (4) Friends / other mothers (18) Professional Expert (9)

This table provides a snapshot indicating the main expressed sources of support. These figures are not reliable in any objective way – they hide a range of levels of support provided and are dependent on the interviewee disclosing / verbally identifying the support they receive. Further there is a high degree of sensitivity in asking about such questions, for example, in relation to financial support and

Income Support eligibility. However, this research is based on a research paradigm that questions the possibility of gathering an objective picture of patterns of support giving and receiving in family lives as what becomes defined and understood as 'support' is socially constructed as well as shifting / being renegotiated on a regular basis. The table merely attempts to provide an overview of the data and some of the general patterns and range of support.

From the table we can see that 31 of the 43 lone mothers involved in this study stated that were financially supported by the state. Twenty of these received Income Support while ten received a range of benefits that were supplemented by earnings from employment. Fourteen of the mothers received some form of maintenance while seven reported receiving financial assistance in a variety of capacities from family members. Five of the mothers claimed to be self-supporting – all of whom were in full-time or part-time (over 20 hours a week) employment. Two had applied for grants or loans from charities for specific purposes.

Childcare support was the most commonly expressed support need. Childcare was required for a number of purposes including regular childcare to support educational courses, training, employment or a 'break' from child-caring as well as less frequent childcare for particular reasons. Here some interesting patterns emerge with the majority of the mothers using sources of informal childcare such as their child's father, a family member (including older children in the household) or friends. Eleven of the mothers reported using private childcare mainly to support employment or adult education opportunities.

Many of the mothers expressed a need for reassurance in decision making as a mother. Nine of the mothers turned to professional guidance in times of need while around half of the sample viewed family members or friends as a source of advice or someone to talk to about family matters.

I will now turn to exploring and explaining these patterns with reference to non-financial sources of support. The extracts below further demonstrate the

interplay between normative guidelines, self / social identity, agency and social / cultural context.

Support from fathers / potential future partners:

Overall most of the mothers viewed 'support' as being a key feature of the 'nuclear family model'. The nuclear family model headed by a heterosexual couple was seen in many ways as desirable and the most common form of family relations. A partner is viewed as a major source of support as well as having a role of responsibility towards the children. A partner could potentially support a mother with the domestic labour and child-rearing within the home. A partner could also share the responsibilities for providing and caring for the family, relieving the burden of duties resting on a lone mother. Fourteen of the women spoke explicitly of their expectations for a partner to provide help with the caring of the children. Some of the women expressed this in terms of sharing the tasks and responsibilities of caring but most were constructing a supportive role for fathers. For example, one expression of the supportive role was in terms of temporary caring for children in order to give a mother a break from continuous demands of childcare. For example, Lauren feels that a cohabiting partner could look after the children at times when she would like a 'half hour' break:

"Sometimes it would be nice to have someone there. Say I am having a really bad day at least I know he will be home at five o'clock. Then I can go into my bedroom for half an hour or maybe wash my hair or dry my hair and be away from the kids for a half hour. But you can't do that." (Lauren, 39, Afro-Caribbean working class woman)

Christie feels her capacity to undertake adult education courses would be facilitated by childcare support from a cohabiting partner as her partner could then look after the children while she undertook a course in the evening. The partner is placed here in a supportive role within the home but not as the central actor caring for the children. A supportive partner is being constructed as someone that offers relief from maternal duties in order for the mother to negotiate a balance between motherhood and other aspirations:

H: "Say if you had a partner at the moment do you think things would be different?"

"I think then you could lock yourself away and leave the kids with the partner. This is my time and go off to the library or go to your bedroom with no disturbances. And things, make it easier. Cos I know when I was doing night class two or three years ago...and my children were younger then and they still wanted me to do this and that. They shared the same bedroom and every night there was an argument!! Like I say now they have their own bedroom, their own space it is nice. But I think it would be courses and things it would be easier. And actually going to a course." (Christie, 36, white working class woman)

Not only is a paternal presence in the home seen to relate to meeting children's needs – it also seems to relate to meeting maternal needs for support.

Many were critical of the lack of support they received from their previous partners. In some cases this was viewed as a lack of commitment as well as a lack of capacity to provide support. Additional to the expectation to provide financially and develop a relationship with their child was the expectation of a live-in partner to provide support with domestic labour and provide emotional support. These four aspects combined were frequently indicated as part of a 'poor partnership'. For example, Justine expected her ex-partners to provide financially security for her and her children and questions their capacity and willingness to do so:

"He has remarried and got a son. Good luck to him as long he is looking after them. But there are times when I wish he would contribute and give me some money. But I can't find him. The CSA can't either. My son's father seems to think being on Job Seekers allowance and having his 23 year old girlfriends, seeing to her needs, having a lodger and doing work on the sly, he is allowed to do that."

H: *"He doesn't contribute?"*

"No not at all."

H: *"Is there anything else that is the thing that is hard about being single?"*

"Financially yer. That is a biggy. It affects all sorts of things. It affects the amount of time I can take my children out. I don't want to take them far or to theme parks or things like that; my children have never been to a theme park. Just things like taking them out on a day trip on a bus. Like to Southville Park or something. I can't do it. Because the money is going elsewhere to pay for their clothes, shoes. My daughter wanted to go on the Normandy trip at school. Only £200. I haven't got it. I would have loved for her to have gone. I asked him to help, with the cost of it. Well I will have to see. And that is what it was like all the

way through until it was too late for her to go anyway. I have asked him to pay for shoes while they have been down there...No. You know can't afford it." (Justine, 26, white working class woman)

Justine is suspicious of her ex-partner's commitment to provide financially and suggests that he is not maintaining his duties as a father. For Janet, providing financially for the family and developing 'strong' relationships with the children was a significant feature of good fatherhood. She valued the support her ex-partner provided in a financial and parenting sense when they were in a cohabiting heterosexual relationship:

"So I spent eight years with Phillip's dad...//.. And he would be there. And problems with the children. If I got upset about something, the kids would have the father figure to bounce off...It was nice to have that stability. He was there for the kids when I wasn't and even if he didn't look after them as well as I did. He was there and there was that stability in our lives and I could... ..There was somebody to plan with or if there was a problem with a child, you know like Ian started getting older. You know, going through the teenage difficulties that you get, and I would have him to talk to." (Janet, 45, white working class mother)

Support from her partner is constructed here as indicating a supportive and secondary role within child-rearing activities. It was when Janet was upset, having difficulty or out at work that her partner and the father of her younger son could provide support. Janet valued the support he gave her in her absence (due to part-time work) and in having someone in the home to talk to when needed in the difficult 'phases' of teenagedom as she describes. However, Janet tends to still assume that her role as a mother, and in particular as a good mother in her view, as the primary actor in caring for children within the home while her partner offers a back-up role again in terms of much valued support within the home.

Janet also notes that increasingly she became frustrated within this relationship when her partner didn't seem to meet her expectations for support and commitments within the home. The extract below offers one example of Janet's disappointment that her experiences did not meet her expectations:

"I started doing evening work, so I would go out to work when my partner came home. And he would be there to make the dinner and he would do the washing up

before I came home if I was lucky. Otherwise, I would fly off the handle, why not? I did everything else... That was some financial security. He was a plasterer. It wasn't reliable work, in the winter he wouldn't have much work. And to be honest, my part-time work income was more of a stable income than his was. ..Yer, all the things I wanted that everybody else in life had. And I still didn't seem able to achieve even though I had a man." (Janet, 45, white working class woman)

Janet was also disappointed at not receiving more help from her partner financially.

*"Like I say I was afraid of being a single parent again, cos I didn't want to experience the poverty and the loneliness, and just coping with the kids on my own because this time I had **two** and I **really really** didn't want to do it. But it came to the point where I had to. There was never going to be the right time to split up with Phillip's dad. He was hopeless with money. I was constantly trying to cope with his lies. I just knew life has got to be better without him. I was never going to get holidays away with my kids as long as that was going on.... And support is important. Having a partner can almost be like having another child."* (Janet, 45, white working class woman)

As well as dashed expectations of honesty within the relationship Janet felt her ex-partner lacked the commitment and the capacity (he undertook temporary, insecure and part-time manual labour) to be financially secure for the sake of their son and her older son. The significance of being single as alone and lonely can also be read in this example. The normative expectation to provide financially (rather than *help with the caring*) for the family seemed a more central role for her partner as the father of her younger son as she compares this expectation with her experience of actually being the higher earner. Janet also indicates that her partner failed to undertake his share of the domestic labour for sustaining daily life in the home. She goes as far to say that having a partner in her previous experience can be akin to 'looking after another child' – a situation she was highly dissatisfied with as she was seeking economic security from a heterosexual partnership. We can see here how Janet's expectations are highly gendered with a male partner offering the possibility for financial security and improvement while the social structures restricting her escape from domestic labour and poverty were also highly class and gender based.

Gender as well as class was often the basis on which to question men's capacity to care for children or perform domestic labour. Some of the women expressed a tension between their desire to be in a supportive heterosexual relationship and their view of men in general or the particular men they knew as lacking commitment and capacity to support them. The stereotype of the incompetent and unwilling father led to an expectation that absent fathers usually are not involved to a great extent or highly committed to maintaining a relationship with their child once the parental relationship has broken down (as fathers even in relationships did not live up to these expectations). However, within this sample of 43 lone mothers, in 17 cases the child had regular contact with their father. In a further 7 cases, contact between the child/ren and father was less frequent or in the process of re-negotiation. Many of these women said they felt 'lucky' that their ex-partners maintained contact with their children after their relationship had broken down and this was viewed as a particularly unique commitment on the part of these individual fathers.

Sarah, in her account of her ex-partner's continuing role in his daughter's life, provides a good example of the perceived norm of paternal lack of commitment to continuing family relations, drawing on the meanings of mothering alone as unsupported mothering and the discourse of lone motherhood as a problem of a lack of support. Sarah, Susan, Maria, Lucinda and Kathleen also valued the financial and parenting support that they received from their ex-partners. In these cases, many of the mothers valued the way parental separation had actually led to more opportunities for them to have a break from caring for children while their children were able to build relationships with their fathers. With parenting stretched across households in this sense, the mothers valued the childcare support their ex-partners were offering and the attention their children were receiving from their fathers. Some of the mothers reported an improvement in their child's relationship with their father as a consequence and a decrease in the unequal division of caring:

"We (the children and I) are a lot closer, we are a lot louder in all sorts of ways. The play is louder, the arguments are louder!!! But we are close too. Cos the feelings are out whereas before..well he was ...what is the word?... unemotional. He never really got into the children's emotions as they were developing and

learning. If it didn't suit him, he didn't want to know and he would go off and do his things and whatever and that would be the end of it you know. Whereas now, we can have fun. He is better since the split, the whole situation with the children.” (Susan, 36, white middle class woman)

Five other women describe a similar experience of their ex-partners being ‘much more attentive with the children now’. This was similar to Smart and Neale’s findings (Smart and Neale 1998).

As well as a measure of commitment to developing relationships with their children, the contact arrangements were facilitated by a number of resources. 13 of the 17 fathers who maintained contact with their children lived nearby. It was common for contact to occur a number of times each week in this context. Other resources included financial, as four of the fathers, who also had secure full-time employment, travelled to visit their children on a weekly basis. Having accommodation suitable for children was also perceived as an important resource for maintaining contact.

For seven of the mothers, paternal contact was every weekend or two days a week. This facilitated more support in terms of childcare than the mothers felt they received within the relationship. For Sarah, this meant she was able to work in the evenings at the weekends as a singer. For Maria and Amanda this facilitated their take up of evening classes whereby they were developing their skills in computer technology and carpentry. For Susan, the regular visits from her ex-partner enabled her to have a break. For many this also facilitated a social life whereby they could go out of the house in the evening and socialise with friends.

The extract below from Kathleen provides a good example of support from a partner / the child’s father having a different meaning than support from extended family or friends. The key issue here is a sense that the father is an equal part of the creation of her daughter and of a sense of family as togetherness in the sense of mother, father and child. Kathleen sees her partner as sharing the responsibility for her daughter whereas her family provide support:

"No, he used to come and listen to her heart and things like that and listen to the scans. And that was it. And so it is also the sharing bit as well. The happy occasions as well. It is nice to share. I have had my family which have been a really good support and my friends which has been brilliant. But I don't know, the person who created her really, it would be nice to be with them." (Kathleen, 32, white working class woman)

Receiving support from an ex-partner / father was not always seen as a satisfactory source of support. Eight of the women felt concerned that the ongoing or potential 'support' they received from their child/ren's father was risky as they experienced this support as a source of control and conflict. For Hazel, asking her children's father for money to provide for her children led to a continued source of abuse and domination:

"Oh yer.. oh yer...cos what he does is that he goes and sees my mum and my sister. And he says to them what he thinks is going on here. He says to them, like that he offers me money and I won't accept it. It's not true. I won't be in a situation where he does that and then I owe him something because that's how he sees me. He doesn't give to me, it's, I owe him, I owe him some money. I owe him my friendship, no way. No way. (Yea). You know, so. Yea, so cos it is really hard sometimes when my oldest boy last year he wanted to go on a week's trip with the school so I did that. (Um) And then he had to cos he had to have new clothes and stuff because I didn't have nothing, so I did all that but that means that all the rest of us have got to do without what we need while we are saving and focusing on one. So we did that. And then it is things like school photos and all their individual trips. And all their book clubs and everything like that comes up. And then it is school clothes and then it is ..ohh. .. it is just one thing after another and we don't even do Christmas. We don't even celebrate Christmas. And birthdays so there isn't even that pressure. So when it came round for like photos um..and my little boy wants to go on a trip again this time, two of them because they are both at middle school now. And they want to go. I thought I will forget what he is like and I will ask him again, i will forget what he makes me feel like. And I got a mouthful of abuse and I thought No. I ain't going to do it, I ain't going to keep doing that.

You know, it is not on. Cos while I have got to do the best for them the other thing about it is ... is part of doing the best for them is making sure I am OK. You know" (Hazel, 28, Afro-Caribbean woman)

Financially Hazel is struggling on Income Support with five children to provide for. She receives no maintenance from her ex-partner. However, asking her partner for money is a risky business as this provides a source of abuse.

Danni talks about the financial contribution from her daughter's father 'coming at a price'.

"He does come and go and now I just want to get on. He turns up every now and then and offers loads of help and sometimes you are like, yes please. Yes you can pick her up and yes you can drop her off. You can get some shopping for me if I am really desperate. But it comes at a price. A high price and so I have learnt not to accept that help. Yes, I would like the help. Benefits, you know it is so hard. I don't drive and a baby on the bus and the pushchair and bags of shopping." (Danielle, 26, Asian middle class woman)

The price of support with domestic labour and financially, as well as contact with her child, is that Danielle is continually affected by her ex-partner's behaviour that she sees as abusive and controlling:

"He really wants to see her and he accuses me of not letting him see her. But I try and make a schedule and tell him you can see her on this day and that day. He says, Oh you are stopping me seeing her. But that's another way of the emotional stress. He knows I feel guilty. He knows I am a soft touch basically and that I will let him come. He comes more than it suits me. I try and do it so it fits her and to say that she needs to know where she stands but he doesn't get it. He thinks if he gives any help well I need it and then he can act as he likes."

"Even the financial thing comes at a price, I am quite worried about it. Even, that I am worried that if I am strict with him that you can only come on this day and not come into my house and then he would say right I am not giving you any money. It is always an emotional blackmail that he has over me so I would like to be able to live without him but he is quite manipulative really. Maybe he is quite desperate as well because he is worried about his daughter."

"What to do with him? What do you mean, what do we argue about? Just using that fact that I need him to get into my world. Or think he has a say on my relationships, my life everything. The way I tidy up. He thinks he can criticise me as if he is in my life as a partner. Even if he was a partner the things he says aren't fair anyway!! So it is using it as a way in. I feel like I am being circled – if someone else shows an interest, or if my life gets going in any way like courses or anything. And he will try and close that circle in - like a wolf. I feel like I am being hunted all the time. Well, it is not that bad but yes, it is. He wants us to be completely trapped and not alive or not. He is controlling. Even when I didn't have Mia he would put me in a situation where I couldn't do anything." (Danielle, 26, Asian middle class woman)

Support here can be seen as a source of continued dependence on and dominance by ex-partners. In the context of few resources for support, and normative guidelines that children need continuing relationships with fathers, lone mothers

negotiate a complex position. The patterns of support emerging from these women's experiences indicate the negotiation of normative guidelines in relation to the resources and relationships that these women are immersed in. The guidelines around fatherhood and support lead to expectations of support in a number of ways. However, in practice support can also be problematic in a number of ways. Relations can include inequalities, fathers can lack the capacity and commitment to support mothers and the boundaries between support, dependence and autonomy can be blurred. While a common notion of fathers' duties was shared, in practice this obligation was negotiated in the context of the mothers' relationship experiences and the resources they could secure to support their needs. It is important to recognise that the mothers' perceptions could change and shift as they made sense of their experiences in relation to notions of 'good fatherhood' / motherhood' or 'poor fatherhood / motherhood'. Much moral self-regulation was being negotiated as the mothers attempted to 'do what was right' for their children as well as much negotiation of insecure resources. Moral guidelines were significant but the crucial question of a particular father's capacity to support a mother financially and in the caring for children was a common concern too.

Support and other family members:

As well as support and duties expected from their child's father, the mothers in this study often looked towards other family members as a source of support. Again this was negotiated around some powerful normative guidelines of support as a key feature of extended family relations as well as close attention to context depending on the specific commitments, capacities and competencies of the family members involved.

Some of the mothers who had older children secured some childcare support from their children. Older children were able to look after younger siblings within the home free of charge. This childcare was often for a couple of hours in the after school period or evening period to facilitate paid work or training. Trisha did not construct this support as a source of concern because she felt strongly about only using informal childcare by family members for any matter

and because she rarely used this form of childcare. She describes how she has all the support she needs as her older son can care for his younger sons if necessary:

"Margaret (sister) did do a lot for me when I first came to Otterworth but she doesn't now. She would have the kids for me or come and take me places but now I think it is all the other way round. And she offers but I feel as Justin is 15 now. If I need anyone to have the kids he does. I don't need anyone else." (Trisha, 38, white working class woman)

Lucinda and Mandy, however, were more concerned that they treated their children too much as 'adults' and sources of support. For Lucinda, the concern was talking to her eight year old about financial matters or her relationship with her father:

"Um..I think what is hard about it is when you are ..there is a temptation especially when they are older to talk to things with them that you shouldn't talk to them about. Like for instance say they haven't paid my income support for some reason and say I was worried about it, it's tempting to say Oh my God they haven't paid my income support and I know it is not fair to do that to children.

But when you haven't got anybody else to say it to, I know it can happen. It is hard not to have another adult to talk to about things like that." (Lucinda, 27, white working class woman)

Mandy characterised her older daughter who is now sixteen as having to grow up as 'her mother's helper' and was concerned that she 'put too much on her':

" I think when you are on your own and they get to that age I think you tend to put too much on them. She's brilliant." (Mandy, 36, white working class)

These quotes offer examples of children providing care and support as contravening norms whereby it is a central feature of adulthood to have such responsibilities. However, these mothers felt that they had limited resources leading to an increased reliance on their older children.

There was an expectation that extended family members, especially grandparents and siblings, should also provide care support.. For example, Jan offered an example earlier of realising her parents offered her much support as a single parent. Realising her parents were supporting her prompted a concern that Jan

was receiving too much support or should reciprocate with more money for rent and so on. Jan seems to see the interviewer as sitting in moral judgement as I introduce the notion that her parents provide much support. These questions of support prompt a concern that Jan should be more grateful for their help. There is evidence that Jan may not have thought about her parents' role in her child's life as 'support' in these senses. This indicates the uncertain nature of family obligations where the specific level of appropriate family support is unknown. Jan's moral identity seems to have been called into question once she thought her parents may be supporting her too much or beyond their line of duty.

Support from family members was generally support from grandmothers, although siblings and fathers were also involved in providing support. In the cases where a lone mother lived near to her own parents and had done so for a considerable time, the support exchange within these relations was more a part of everyday life. For example, Kimberley's mother and sister were part of her everyday social networks and also provided childcare support. Kimberley still refers to herself as 'independent' even though her mother and sister provide a ready source of childcare. Christie's mother also lives nearby in the same street. Christie refers to her mother as very supportive:

"I had a good Mum anyway and she used to look in the cupboards. We used to say... Oh we haven't had yogurts in a long time....And that's when you feel guilty and you think, Oh my God. You sort of alternate different treats. You know."

H: *"You have had the support of your Mum?"*

"Oh yer, she is brilliant. Oh I see her everyday. Um, I wouldn't ask her for help, I think I have asked her once. But she would have a look in the cupboards and you come back and it's all like filled up. She has always been there and she still is. She still helps out. That is Mums for you. She is just there, always helps out. I am lucky cos she has been there for me." (Christie, 42, white working class woman)

However, her mother did not provide childcare - a major support need that Christie identifies. This was because Christie did not want to ask her mother who was suffering from ill-health. Even within families there is much regulation and self-regulation of 'self-sufficiency'. This is negotiated alongside notions of family obligation and support, in tension with ideas of adult self-sufficiency.

Further resources such as parents living nearby can facilitate parental support but is also negotiated in relation to individual circumstances such as ill-health.

Seven of the mothers moved to be near to their parents when they separated from their ex-partners (three of these seven moved back to the parental home). Needs for support thus prompted action which brought families together across generations. Within some of these accounts there was a problematic discourse around increased dependency on one's parents after a period of self-sufficiency (although this may in fact have been dependence on a man). Heather moved nearer to her mother and father once her mother retired which increased her mother's capacity to support her with the care of her young son:

"I was lucky because I went to my parents - I had somewhere to go. I don't think I really did that badly. The day my Mum retired, I came home. It gave me an opportunity. If that wasn't there I don't know." (Heather, 28, white middle class woman)

Susan also moved to the city her mother lived in when she left her long-term cohabiting relationship. Moving nearer to her mother enabled Susan to have a form of informal childcare and social networks when moving to a new city:

"But the only thing I was able to do was to move to Otterworth here because my Mum was here so I knew I would have a bit of support initially anyway. And that was the main thing. That would be the advice I would give to anybody. Make sure you go somewhere where there is somebody just round the corner if you are desperate." (Susan, 36, white middle class woman)

However, there were also mixed feelings about receiving family support. Susan felt unsupported as her mother, in her view, dedicated most of her time to her own partner. Kathleen, Hazel and Mia had mixed feelings about moving back into their parents' house after separating from their partners. Living with parents was a mark of dependency which conflicted with the expectation to be self-sufficient as an adult. For example, Kathleen describes this dilemma below:

H: *"Did you feel like they were doing you a favour?"*

"That is it, I know they love me and they want the best for me, and whatever, but there is also that sense of duty thing... They are there because, they are doing it

because, not that they have no choice but because that is what they do. You know you are constantly worried about outstaying your welcome.” (Kathleen, 27, white working class woman)

Kathleen seems concerned about relying too much on her parents as she is unsure if they want to support her or are feeling obliged to support her. She is unsure of their willingness to support her. Other extracts within Kathleen’s account illustrates the way that returning to live with her parents, while valued at the time as a source of support, also called in question Kathleen’s ability to be a self-reliant, capable and responsible adult. Not needing support here is a sign of coping. Not only did the ‘crisis’ of lone motherhood and relationship breakdown increase these mother’s anxieties about coping, they also felt uncertain and uncomfortable with the idea of increased dependency on their parents.

Families also pooled financial resources across generations. Again this was negotiated rather than assumed and could generate tensions with a self-identity that valued self-sufficiency (or at least the goal of self-sufficiency). Financial support from family members was often to help with the costs of particular items. For example, Kathleen and Danni received help with housing costs. Both of their parents had helped them buy housing. This was lower cost housing such as a mobile home and ex-council property. Both were ‘grateful’ for their parents’ support which they felt ‘lucky’ about. Geeta, Jan, Beverley and Amanda also received parental financial support for children’s activities, holiday childcare and holidays. Kathleen and Geeta are sisters and both of them refer to their extended family as supportive and close. Geeta feels lucky to have a supportive family which can help her financially and with leisure opportunities:

H: “In terms of support, do you feel supported?”

“Oh yes, I am very lucky to have a very close family.”

H: “And how do they support you?”

“We went to South Africa in February. What happened, one of my sister's works for virgin airways, she is an in-flight beautician. And she had a flight out to Cape Town in February. And asked us to come along. We all got free flights, but my parents paid the airport tax for the two of us. Um. and then when we got to South Africa, cos Virgin provided her with a room, we all stayed in the room.

My parents are always buying things for Penny. In the sales they might buy clothes. You should see her bedroom; it is like a toyshop. Um..so I am very lucky with them. They help me out with bills. ... So they sent the debt into the hands of a debt collector, and um they said I had seven days to pay, all right then it would go to court. Lucky enough I had good parents who lent me the money to clear the debt off. And I haven't had to pay them back.” (Geeta, 42, white working class woman)

Many of the mothers would have liked more family support than was offered which they saw as due to a lack of capacity or a lack of commitment. Lucinda felt unsupported by her step-sister, who lived nearby and therefore had the capacity to see her more regularly, and by her family as they did not ask how she was coping:

H: “And you said a bit before about not feeling like you had enough support. Could you tell me a bit more about that.”

“I think that people, with my family, I think, sometimes they never ask me if I am alright. Even if it is quite obvious if I am not. My Mum and my Dad have both got partners now. My Dad is married and my Mum lives with someone.” (Lucinda, 27, white working class woman)

Lucinda and Susan also value the support they receive from grandparents but they also question the extent of commitment to support them. They feel there is a gap between their support needs and the support they receive from their family as well as their child's father:

“My Mum has been pretty good since I have been on my own. She took Janet down to my Grandmother's for two days in the half term. And I was just so pissed off at the time, and I was just so glad she had taken her, I was so grateful.

My sister's very good as well. She will sometimes do something like, if she knows it's a weekend and I am not doing anything she will say, Oh shall we go out for a drive or do you want to come over to our house? She is someone to talk to as well.

But I don't feel well supported. My step sister lives round the corner and she used to be single but she is married now. And I used to get two buses, to go and see her up in Jarroth. And she has been round here like twice since I have moved.” (Lucinda, 27, white working class woman)

Susan and Lucinda feel that they would like more support but only actually ask for support when they are 'desperate' acknowledging the other commitments in the lives of family members:

"When she is not in France which seems to be a third of the year!! If it is a school time we go round for tea on a Friday night. Straight from school, come back around 7. So I can have a drink. So it is nice in the day when I have the kids around me so that I can just sit back and watch them playing and not have to do anything. That's really nice, quite a treat for me. And then holiday time we may see her an extra day. In half term, we saw her about two or three times. She took Geraldine to the Museum. Which was nice. And I went shopping with her, Adam and Karl and she stayed with Bert, her husband, and having that other adult to talk to was very good for Geraldine. Um so yer, we don't see her very often really. If she is going shopping she will take me but nothing major really...I don't shout if I need help. It is more the practical things she will help me with. The shopping, I don't drive." (Susan, 39, white middle class woman)

Illness, physical distance, other commitments and lack of time were cited as constraints on family members capacities to provide support. Support needed to be negotiated alongside other commitments and capabilities in family members lives.

Support and broader social networks:

Friends were also discussed as a significant source of support. Friends were mainly valued as a source of informal childcare, as offering empathy and support in the sharing of problems and life concerns and as a source of adult friendship for children broadening their social networks. Most of the mothers had developed social networks of friends who were mothers, often facilitated through local community based services such as pre-school activities, school or childcare. Those who reported a higher satisfaction with their social networks in terms of friendship and support had integrated their networks with their mothering. Where there were more marked 'boundaries' between friendships and mother-based networks, the mothers tended to struggle more with issues of social isolation and support. As well as the overlap between friendships and maternal social worlds, there were also conflicts over needs for support and moral considerations of being self-sufficient / responsible as a parent.

Those mothers who felt they had a supportive friendship network had social networks mainly consisting of other mothers. These networks of mothers were also mainly facilitated through some form of local collective / institution. For example, six of the mothers (apart from Rasheene) accessed through local family centres reported having close friendships with the other mothers who they saw daily at the family centre or in their homes nearby. Nine others referred to the central role that pre-school groups, community centres, lone parent groups or church groups had in facilitating a network of mothers who became friends and sources of support. In most of these cases there is evidence of a collective identity, irrespective of lone parenthood, as participants felt they shared a common interest in helping each other as mothers.

Kimberley and Melissa refer to the importance of their local family centre when they describe it as a 'home from home'. The full context of Kimberley's view of the family centre is given below:

H: "And do you come down here quite often?"

"Yea, I've well obviously, my kid's school is joint to this so usually I come in here for a coffee at nine after I have dropped them off. Then I pass through at ten to three. Have a fag and find out the days gossip. That kind of thing. This is like a second home to me."

H: "If this wasn't here can you imagine what you would do?"

"Oh God no!!! I'd have all my housework done everyday!! I couldn't imagine what it would be like not having this place. It is like my second family do you know what I mean?? Well, my Mum lives across the road to me. And it is brilliant. The kids grew up round here and I know where they are and whatever. But obviously I have been living here for seven years now, and I have been coming here for seven years. It's like some of the times in my life I wouldn't have got through without this place...I mean sometimes stupid things like getting a red bill and getting in a fuff about it. Thinking, Oh my God, they are going to cut my gas and electric!!! There is always somebody up here who knows about it, do you know what I mean? So we all look out for each other. If somebody don't know about somebody then there is always someone around who does or knows someone around like that." (Kimberley, 27, white working class mother)

Some of the mothers reported a loss of friendship as they started paid work or their children moved beyond pre-school age. For example, for Melissa, Janet and Catherine, 'moving on' implied losing networks that were associated with

daily life as an unemployed mother. For Melissa and Janet, taking up higher education and paid work had, in their eyes, led to an increase in their social isolation as they lost touch with friendships facilitated through the local family centres and mother groups. Susan as well as a quarter of the other mothers regretted the loss of friendship they had experienced as their children moved to school and they no longer attended pre-school. While community-based networks were valued, the criteria for belonging to such networks were restrictive.

There were also complexities surrounding receiving support from friends. For example, several of the other mothers arranged informal childcare through their networks. Justine only uses friends as a source of childcare so that she can go out in the evening:

H: "Do you feel pretty well supported now?"

"I could do with more. But then again everybody can do with more friends. If people had more friends we wouldn't need therapists and counsellors."

H: "And do you, what childcare do you use?"

"Just friends. My preferences are people I know and people the children trust. If the children don't trust them that that is it. Or if the other person children don't get on with my children." (Justine, 27, white working class woman).

However, although it may be alright to ask a friend for evening babysitting, Justine feels it would be wrong to ask her friends to provide a regular commitment for childcare which she considers as more acceptable to ask of a partner or a family member:

"I can't do an access course in an evening because I need a reliable babysitter. Or childminder. But I can't afford it. And getting a friend to do it is asking a bit much because it is one to two years. It's overstepping the boundaries of friendship. Asking them to foster you really, will you take me on as a sister? But um it's something that I think I will have to wait until all three children are at middle school. Where I can get some sort of part-time job if I am allowed to earn a set amount to pay for the course. Or to pay for the childminder. In school hours. It is putting more on myself really. It is times like that I'd rather have a partner...I just want one that won't speak, won't have an opinion. That will sit in

the corner and play with the children!!!” (Justine, 27, white working class woman)

Danni, while she would like to know other mothers and to have more supportive relationships with friends, is concerned about ‘imposing on her friends’ or ‘being a burden on them’:

“My Mum emotionally, but she isn't around a lot, she travels around a lot. I don't really get emotional support - it is me that makes sure that ends meet, me that makes sure that things happen. Bits and pieces. It would be nice, well because this is on tape I don't mind talking but I don't normally tell people anything. It's very unusual for me to say anything. It would be nice to get to know people in this area because a lot of my friends are in Megaville. To get a close friend here would be good... I know this girl who lives a few mile away, I don't drive so that is half an hour away. I feel bad imposing on people. The only people you get to know as a mother is other people with kids. And they have got enough to deal with and you don't want to burden them with your things as well. It is a question of doing each other a favour. It's still a lot involved in going out. Getting a lift and babysitting. You do want to go out but the people you know are mothers and at the same time you both have kids. They can either babysit for you or go out with you. It is so complex.” (Danielle, 26, Asian middle class woman)

Sarah, along with several other mothers, also remarked that their friends also had commitments, family responsibilities as well as others, which limited their capacity to provide support. Sarah talked about her social networks as categorised into two types of social groups – both with commitments that stretched their resources and capacity for providing support:

“Um..the most important issues for me are that thing of feeling unsupported during the week and to do with school runs and to do with just feeling like you have always got to be the one, you have got to be healthy. And thinking, the moment you start feeling ill thinking Oh no Oh no What am I going to do? That's like a major issue. And on the good side, the sort of good relationship I have with her father which is really supportive, and on the bad side the lack of support around here. The feeling that, even though I have been here ten years there is nobody that I can really turn to in a crisis. There probably are, my friends might say, God why didn't you turn to me? but I am just quite a proud person. I am very, I keep a lot of things close to my chest. Like you probably noticed earlier on with my lodger (we went upstairs). I am quite confidential person. If I open up to somebody I really expect them to respect I am talking to them and not to the rest of the bloody world. And I give that back to anybody ten fold. I'm really into respecting confidentiality. And privacy and because of that I am the kind of person that although I am really open in lots of ways I find it really hard to ask for help. I think a lot of single parents do. To admit that you need help. I just think, you look around and everyone else has got their problems and da da da. I

have got a lot of friends and they are all so busy or dynamic or so, they are either really busy and dynamic or really down trodden worse situations than me, really bad health or awful situations. I can't ask them and I can't ask the dynamic active people because they wouldn't have a second. It is really quite difficult. You feel quite, I don't know, it is funny."

"And friends are friends but they all have their own problems and stuff. I don't feel like I can ask them so the only person I feel I do have the right to phone up if it is really desperate is Kieran. But he is two hours away. So I don't because of that. Because I know he is going to say I can't. And he works really hard, and he has never got time to you know come away from the office or blar blar. So um it's that fundamental lack of support as a single parent and feeling like you are totally alone and like it is all down to you. You have got to be fit and healthy. I am not always fit and healthy." (Sarah, 32, white middle class woman)

Tamara is also concerned if she asks her friends to baby-sit for her that she may be asking too much:

"My mum is always saying, because I am always asking her, yea, I do, I am really crap at asking people. I do though if I am really desperate I do tend to ask people and I don't have a problem with that. I would love to ask people like Cathy over the road. I know she would really appreciate it and I know Adrian really like the company. She has only got one child, she has got a partner, and I'd know she would appreciate it but I can't bring myself to ask her."

H: "Do you know why that might be?"

"You just don't want to be a burden on anybody. I think you just don't want to be. It is ridiculous because you know they would say no. It would be as simple as that. I can't do it, I'm sorry can we make it another time. I know that is the response I would get. Um..I don't know what it is I just think Oh I don't want to be a burden. And you know sometimes, the odd occasion we go out to lunch every blue moon, but I actually feel quite bad to ask someone to look after my kids during the lunchtime because it is a real privilege and I get a bit embarrassed that I am doing it. I feel like I shouldn't really be doing it because I have got two kids, and you know I shouldn't be gallivanting and having lunches in restaurants." (Tamara, 34, white middle class woman)

Tamara here is distinguishing between a deserving need and an undeserving need for support. Lea felt unable to turn to her friends in time of difficulty because she was concerned that complaining to friends may be interpreted as complaining too much and risks her identity as a lone mother who copes:

"When I separated from Karl I had two friends - they were the only two people really that I shared all my stuff with. Mandy, I didn't bother her with it. I didn't

bother any of my close friends with it. I stuck to two close friends and occasionally told them bits, not a lot. The rest of it I took to this group. Even though I could listen to anyone all day everyday about their problems, you just feel terrible don't you? You feel like you are repeating yourself, I just don't want to put myself down.

I didn't want friends to cross the road again - here comes Lea talking about her problems. So I tried really hard not to.” (Lea, 27, white working class woman)

Together, thirteen of the mothers had similar issues about asking too much from friends and the implications of asking for support within friendships. Being proud of coping was a significant issue in negotiating support with friends. Sarah and Kimberley exemplify these concerns about maternal identity and coping in the following extracts:

H: “Have you got any friends that would be able to take her?”

“I just don't feel like I can turn to anybody about it. I find that whole issue really difficult. Because I think to myself, I sometimes feel a bit resentful because I think to myself if I was in that position and I knew a single parent in that position I'd offer to take. I think I shouldn't have to ask. I find it really hard. I am quite proud like that and I think no. I don't know I just get really desperate and when I get desperate. In the interim periods I push it under the carpet and I don't want to think about it and I think I can cope and I'm really proud and I don't want to ask anyone. And then when I am really ill I am just a mess and I can't cope and I am in floods of tears. And it is just embarrassing to phone anyone up when you are feeling like that. I sort of swing between the two scales of thinking Oh my God!! I can cope, I can cope, it is going to be alright. To thinking Oh my God what am I going to do? what can I do?” (Sarah, 32, white working class woman)

Kimberley makes many references to her pride in her identity as an independent woman and a mother who ‘copes well’. She feels this does limit her capacity to ask for help:

“But sometimes, I don't if.. you know what I mean. There is certain people I'd ask and certain people you wouldn't. Yet certain people you wouldn't ask are only too happy to ask you. Do you know what I mean?”

H: “What's that about then?”

“I just try to manage all the time, I think. That's what it is, ...I think pride as well. I don't like asking people as well.” (Kimberley, 27, white working class woman)

The implications of coping on your own and not sharing concerns or stresses of being a lone parent can be isolation and loneliness as many of the women discussed. These accounts demonstrate the complexities of negotiating family support in the context of expectations of self-sufficiency as an adult and notions of maternal responsibilities for children. Many of the mothers were making claims for support but had to negotiate these against the moral imperative that a good mother meets all her child's needs in an unproblematic way. Securing such support may uphold a notion of being an irresponsible or failing parent / adult.

Conclusion:

Respondents in this study packaged caring and financial support from a number of sources (public sources of support were not reviewed in this chapter although they were discussed – this was so that the discussion could concentrate on other sources of support that were detailed in more depth). There were many complex meanings surrounding accessing and receiving family support. While most of the mothers felt that partners, family members and friends were their preferred source of support, social support was negotiated within the context of the mothers' experiences and relationships. Perception and knowledge of a person's willingness and capacity to support them became part of these negotiations. Many family members, partners and friends had a limited capacity to offer regular financial or childcare support.

I have also shown in this chapter how concern about one's identity as a responsible mother (particularly in the sense of caring) was also negotiated alongside perceptions of support needs. At times this concern about identity as a good mother produces a conflict with accessing social support. Social support seems heavily associated with problems rather than being an inherent part of the resources for good parenting. Many of the extracts above demonstrate attempts to make legitimate claims for support in the face of perceptions that those claims may not be seen by others as legitimate.

Part 4: Conclusions

Chapter Eight

Concluding Discussion

Introduction

In this concluding chapter, I will bring together the overall argument developed during the thesis. The central focus of the discussion will be on examining the ways that mothers' are embedded in a complex social context. The significance of the individual and local contexts which shape mothers' experiences and perceptions, leads to much complexity in decisions about paid work and in how to meet children's needs. This complexity is not fully recognised in current policy frameworks. These key themes will be discussed in relation to the methodological, theoretical and policy implications of the study. Before setting out these implications, I will briefly review the key debates and data findings highlighted in this study.

In Chapter 1, it was argued that recent policy developments drew on research evidence and policy discourses that highlighted several patterns of disadvantage and inequality among lone mother headed households. This body of research evidence, for example, includes studies that argue that lone mother headed families are disproportionately represented among families with high rates of child and family poverty, that live in poorer housing, that are the victims of crime, that are unemployed, that are dependent on welfare and have more involvement in child protection services (Lupton 2004; Millar and Ridge 2002). Lone mother headed families also tend to live in more deprived areas where public services are less accessible or available (Lupton 2004).

Such evidence, while acknowledging some general patterns of disadvantage, has contributed to social problem and social threat discourses of lone motherhood dominating UK social policy objectives. Lone motherhood can be inherently connected to risks for children, parents and society. To break the cycle of deprivation and poor outcomes for children, adults and communities, New Labour has invested in childcare, early education, family support and public

services for lone parents, low income parents and families living in 'deprived' area. Taking up paid work supplemented by in-work benefits, accessing professional sources of support and working in partnership with the state forms the framework of solutions to these problems.

However, this policy framework has been criticised for not recognising the diversity of commitments and capacities among lone mothers. Firstly, the role of human capital and social capital has been recognised as facilitating better outcomes for children across family forms (Callender and Kemp 2000). Secondly, lone mothers' agency and commitments to sustain their child's wellbeing often goes unrecognised. Mothers can be equally aware and concerned about the risks to children's needs that are discussed in policy debates (Beresford et al 2000). They can act in resourceful ways, developing coping strategies to ensure that their children are protected from the risks associated with poverty, welfare dependency or parental separation (Graham 1984). This relates to the earlier point about the role of local networks and social capital, although as this study demonstrated there were also tensions in accessing support and energising networks as many of the mothers highlighted. Thirdly, the complex role of the moral, relational and situated contexts in which mothers raise their children needs to be recognised. Policy is based on an economic rationality and gender neutral conception of parental responsibility which fails to capture the gendered, classed and cultural aspects of power relations (Duncan and Edwards 1999).

In relation to these debates and issues of analysis, there are three main sets of implications from this study. These relate to methodological / empirical implications; theoretical implications and policy implications. The first section below turns to consider the methodological and empirical contributions and limitations of this study.

The Empirical and Methodological Contributions and Limitations of the Study.

This study of women's experiences of motherhood was informed by interpretive, social constructionist and feminist perspectives in social policy and sociology.

These perspectives argue that social problems are constructed in the context of cultural and material dimensions of power relations and inequalities (Lewis 1997; Millar 2003). While different theories can focus on structural elements of inequality or local elements, the cultural or the material – collectively the emphasis on examining gendered patterns of inequality remains. The role of the state in family life is often critically reviewed in relation to processes of social control and disempowerment as well as for possibilities for a more progressive democratic agenda (Millar 2003; Lister 2002).

These political and theoretical standpoints led to an overall concern to compare and contrast policy definitions of the problems, constraints and opportunities shaping lone mothers agency with mothers own understandings and perspectives as embedded agents in local social worlds. These understandings were gathered via doing in-depth interviews with lone mothers in order to ask them about their perspectives on policy definitions of the problems (paid work exclusion; childcare availability and so on), as well as finding out what the ‘problems’, support needs, priorities and solutions were according to them. In order to compare and contrast mothers support needs and concerns, the sample of mothers involved a range of family and socio-economic circumstances.

Methodological strengths and limitations:

Methodologically, there are several strengths and limitations to the approach developed. The strengths of this study, I would argue, involve the deconstruction of policy categories and problems when placed against women’s own experiences and concerns. Rather than begin from a policy concern and assess ‘what works’ in practice and how to achieve ‘policy objectives’, there is a role for sociological and critical research to analyse the consequences and appropriateness of current policy objectives. The policy objectives in this study have been critiqued from a position of recognising the complexity and dimensions of lived experiences. Policy concerns are placed in the context of what were the main concerns for women themselves. These questions lead us to ask critical questions about the role of the state and governments in family life. It is important to make explicit the political standpoint being evoked here, in that the role of the state is represented as facilitating wellbeing, choice, support and

empowerment. This is a political project and needs to be supplemented by a further analysis of the nature of state intervention in family life. However, the divergence between mothers' own concerns and policy objectives can highlight the potentially controlling and coercive nature of current policy agendas. A grounded analysis of mothers support needs beginning from women's concerns and social worlds, makes visible the limitations of policy representations of people's lives. What became significant, and will be discussed in more depth in the following theoretical considerations, was the complex local, individual and wider social context that mothers negotiated and the variety of their concerns in relation to wellbeing, health, security, coping and social ties as well as economic maximisation. However, New Labour Governments have so far prioritised concerns about economic self-sufficiency and responsible citizenship.

However, methodologically, this study does have limitations. These are the limitations of the research design as it stands in capturing the multi-dimensional relationship between agency and social structures. While the study as it stands provides a rigorous starting point, further data collection and design strategies would need to be developed to capture the contextual nature of mothers' biographies, values and resources. One drawback, which could be developed in future research, was the lack of a longitudinal element in the research design. In interviewing a range of mothers in different family and socio-economic situations, the research has been more able to capture issues of 'breadth' in data about the range of women's experiences but less able to specify and trace the complex individual, local and wider social processes shaping agency. A longitudinal design that followed a smaller number of mothers' over a period of time would be one alternative design that could capture the processes in more depth as well as chart the shifting and negotiated nature of values and resources at the local context.

Devising a wide ranging sample of mothers to include in the study facilitated an analysis of the similar and contrasting identities, perceptions, priorities and circumstances among lone mothers. Mothers living in different localities, with different patterns of paid work / income generation, embedded in different social networks and socio-economic backgrounds were included in the study. This

strategy led to displacing the policy notions of difference and similarity among mothers' support needs. However, the sample selection as it stands can also be a limitation. In future research, the opportunistic nature of the sample gathering process could be supplemented by a more purposeful strategy. The conclusions so far and below indicate the role of the individual, local and wider context in shaping lone mothers' agency. A future development could be to purposefully select a sample of mothers' who may be considered as sharing or contrasting in contextual location. For example, mothers' living in the same locality, with few educational qualifications or having the same number and age of children could be selected in order to analyse their experiences and resources in more depth. One of the major strengths of qualitative research is to provide an in-depth examination of context and social processes in a way that quantitative research finds challenging (Mason 1996; Duncan 2004). This study of lone motherhood informs the development of future research that can contextualise mothers' lives and concerns in ways that capture the complexity of their experiences and social locations. The study indicates the limitations of explaining mothers' actions in terms of family formation, values or income. In practice it was the complex interplay of a range of factors, which shaped mothers decisions and actions. Policy then is also limited if based on categories of family form or income alone, as this rarely captures the wider picture of the resources available or demands on a mother.

In studying the local context of mothers' lives an eclectic use of qualitative and quantitative methods may have been useful. This data set provides the basis for further research using life histories (which could gather in-depth data on individual life trajectories), ethnographic or community based designs which could gather perspectives and context information about the services and families in an area. This could introduce some further comparative element into a study of the local context. Having an in-depth picture, perhaps following a survey design or via interviews, of the public as well as community self-help services available in an area could provide a yardstick from which to compare mothers' own perceptions of the support available. In-depth interviews with parents and professionals could further examine the discourses of lone motherhood, family support and family values circulating at the local level. This study indicates the

complexity of mothers experiences with many possible tensions surrounding accessing support for either taking up paid work or for other family matters. While there is no objective stance on the local 'risks, resources and opportunities' in an area, gathering a range of perspectives could develop the analysis towards creating a dialogue about the situated nature of children's and parents' needs.

A further methodological issue would be to expand the research sample beyond a fixed notion of 'lone mother'. As there were diverse understandings in relation to family form categories and notions of difference and similarities between family circumstances, it would be useful to capture the contextual basis to family resources and relationships across families. This study has generated findings that relate to the diverse meanings and discourses surrounding family formations. The conclusions below argue that family formations only form one part of the context for family life. It is the underlying material and cultural trajectories and structures that appear to play a greater role if we are examining patterns of poverty and disadvantage. Comparing the social location, constraints and opportunities shaping experiences across the diversity of family formations would be a more useful research design that could assess these claims in greater depth.

Theoretical Contributions and Limitations of the Study:

The points raised so far are arguably some of the logical conclusions of the theoretical implications of the study findings. There are several theoretical contributions that this study makes to current debates about maternal experiences, the social processes shaping maternal agency and the relationship between motherhood and policies / public support.

Lone mother as a chaotic concept and discursive construction:

Firstly, 'lone motherhood' as a 'chaotic concept' with limited explanatory utility, as Duncan and Edwards (1999) argue, conveys some of the issues that have arisen during this study. My initial interest in examining how policy represents lone mothers' concerns and family lives has further developed to a critical awareness of the socially constructed nature of accounts of motherhood and the

role of policy discourses and categories in representing / conceptualising motherhood in particular ways. The chaotic nature of 'lone motherhood' as a concept relates to the assumptions of difference and normality that such a concept conveys and rests on which are essentially value laden and perform the cultural role of 'othering' and categorising lone motherhood (Lister 2003). Meanings and discourses of lone motherhood can begin from a position of difference. They raise questions such as, what is a lone mother compared with a mother who is not a lone mother? And what are the effects of lone motherhood for mothers, children and society? In this study there was a diversity of understandings that contest to the many aspects of family life that lone motherhood can signify, but there were also similar social standpoints and recognised ways of constructing norms and difference. In the main, the mothers' supported the dominant constructions of normal family life as stable couple heterosexual family formations, although, some did also present counter-discourses that questioned, resisted or challenged the prevailing norms as desirable.

'Lone mother family' then does not merely describe a family form providing a policy function and a measurable social group. There is a cultural process of categorising families and in particular, difference among families. The mothers' identified in various ways with this policy category. Lone motherhood could signify difference along the lines of living alone, being single, parental separation or mothering alone and also in terms of deviance, disadvantage or benefits. When the mothers' experienced these situations, they felt they were lone mothers. However, by presenting these situations as different, the norm of the cohabiting, sharing, couple-led family is constructed, recognised as the norm and reinforced. The way that lone motherhood could relate to many aspects of family life highlights the key role of meanings, identity and notions of norms / difference.

As representations of difference / normality the mothers did seem to capture their experience in similar ways with the four discourses of lone motherhood being recognisable across the accounts (as suggested by Duncan and Edwards 1999). The accounts were concerned with issues of coping, autonomy, choice,

difference and deviance which are similar to the issues at the heart of the social threat, social problem, patriarchy and lifestyle choice discourses of lone motherhood. However, the mothers engaged and constructed these discourses in several ways that involved the active negotiation and definition of meanings that could represent their experiences and aspirations. The socially constructed nature of discourse involved the practice of meaning making. The mothers' discourses often varied from those emphasised in policy although there were also some similarities. Discursive positions could also involve a form of social recognition for claims of independence, needs or normality. The accounts were also riddled with tensions in constructing a coherent narrative and portrayal of experience. It was most common for the social problem, escape from patriarchy and social threat discourses to be evoked. The most tenuous position was in the case of asserting one's independence or choice, as we saw with Melissa or Patricia. Here constructions of a narrative could involve shifting positions between a desire to be independent and make choices towards a concern to gain social recognition for a lack of resources and opportunities to sustain such choices.

Some of these issues can be exemplified further. There was a particular emphasis on recognising and affirming their experiences, which was presented more coherently by those mothers who had been lone mothers for a longer period of time. Valuing the 'independent' nature of heading a family or household as a lone mother was stressed in eleven of the accounts. Many beneficial aspects such as having a heightened sense of autonomy or control were assigned to living alone, being single or parental separation. These situations of adversity may also over time facilitate a range of skills that enhance self-responsibility or capacities to take control of one's life and be a more responsible parent. Lone motherhood could also facilitate a security of resources or an enhanced sense of authority when compared to the hidden violence, oppression or poverty that some women experience in cohabiting couples. Some of the mothers felt that parent-child relations had improved following parental separation. Not only did they value the emotional ties they had with their children, often paternal – child relations also improved in their view. Policy discourses around lone motherhood tend to neglect these beneficial aspects of alternative family forms and the risk or

pressures that can be part of couple family life. Public debates need to shift from a notion of vulnerability based on family formations to one about the risks and vulnerabilities that mothers, fathers and children experience across family forms.

The underlying social processes operating here are those for cultural recognition. These mothers were engaged in a project to feel valued and recognised for their contribution to society and efforts. The ideal and desire to be an independent adult who does not 'depend' on public resources or who is able to cope with their responsibilities is a key aspect of moral reputation. However, the engagement for cultural recognition, which one can say is facilitated by a set of policy discourses that primarily present lone mothers' lives and motivations in problematic ways, has several tensions for mothers. These tensions revolve around the limitations and constraints they experience in securing the resources that would facilitate their independence or recognise their contribution to society as good enough mothers rather than as good mothers and active paid workers (Williams 2004).

Asserting one's capacity to cope as a lone mother could present tensions when one experienced a time of neediness. For example, Patricia, Kimberley, Sarah, Justine and others, felt their friends and family did not recognise their support needs. But these women also wanted to be recognised for their capacity to be independent, coping, good enough mothers. They themselves confessed to being unable to articulate their needs for support as they felt others identified them as 'strong' or 'independent' characters. Further tensions arose when mothers who considered themselves able to cope with and committed to balancing paid work and motherhood, found that in practice this was a challenging or unsustainable option. Many of the women expressed a sense of failure or disappointment, investing again in the need to reaffirm their commitments to being good enough mothers in other ways. It was often possible to draw on a tradition of women's authority as mothers and expertise in relation to meeting children's needs in order to justify the way that caring for one's children had to take first place before choosing to take up paid work.

On the other hand, evoking the social problem discourse of lone motherhood was also common. This discourse of lone motherhood takes for granted the legitimate claim for public support that lone mothers have. Again from the mothers' perspectives, there was a process of cultural recognition apparent here. Many of the mothers felt their support needs were going unrecognised by friends, family or the state. The nature of those support needs varied from practical, childcare, financial or emotional support. Further, identifying with this representation of experiences can in itself act as a constraint on action as capacities to act are viewed as limited and barriers are constructed.

Some of the mothers, however, presented an alternative discursive strategy. This was one that stressed the normality of their family life. Kimberley and Lucinda for example, felt that mothering alone was akin to normal mothering. They did resist a position of difference, but rather were involved in the process of gaining cultural recognition as normal, responsible, stay at home (or part-time working) mothers.

The language, discursive and cultural context within which these mothers were constructing accounts of motherhood seemed restricted in providing possibilities to be independent while needy, normal while different and for mothers to have a multiplicity of shifting needs in relation to independence, autonomy, inter-dependence and support. Capturing the multiple and shifting nature of human needs and identities have been lines of inquiry developed by feminist philosophers and sociologists in relation to the universal nature of tensions in balancing autonomy with dependency and inter-dependency (Sevenhuijsen 2002; Lister 2003; Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards 2002). It is likely that a policy intervention that heavily constructs lone mothers as either needy, deviant or as shaping their lifestyles will lead to counter discourses that make claims about alternative aspects of experiences. A recognition of the complexity of maternal experiences would be fruitful alternative. Further there is evidence that mothers themselves feel that their experiences are misrepresented, labelled deviant and stigmatised from the social threat and social problem discourses. This leads to much investment in processes that involve the search for cultural recognition.

Another aspect of the chaotic nature of lone motherhood relates to the limitations of organising policy interventions on categories of family form. The diverse social contexts and sets of relationships that mothers inhabited meant that a definition of lone motherhood as one that lives alone with her children is likely to not capture the actual lived family relations or processes of resource interchanges. The key point here is to recognise that household units are not synonymous to family units and that mothers' actively create and sustain social ties and reciprocal relations. While couple headed family households can hide patterns of unequal resource allocations, lone mothers can give and receive resources beyond their households and family members.

The Complexity of Maternal Agency:

A further overall theoretical implication of this study involves the complexity of maternal agency and the contribution made to theories of social relations and social structures. Although there was some diversity to mothers' discourses and capacities as mothers and paid workers, it is possible to analytically devise a common framework from which to grasp this complexity. This framework is similar to those devised by Williams (1999) and Duncan and Edwards (1999), in examining the relationship between individuals and social context. Williams refers to the individual, local, institutional and broader social relations of welfare (Williams 1999). Duncan and Edwards (1999) set out the moral, local and national factors shaping mothers' agency. In examining maternal agency, it is the role of the individual, local and broader social context that is important to recognise. These contexts also have cultural as well as material sources of power relations. This argument adds to current understanding and research evidence around lone motherhood, agency and social structures as it is the interplay and holistic significance of all these contexts, which stands out if one examines mothers' experiences. This is not a whole picture or attempt at a grand theory. This study did not consider many other aspects of context and social processes such as the global economic relations or institutional / professional relations with welfare users which informed the theories developed by Williams and Duncan and Edwards. Rather, theoretically, this study adds to an understanding of the complexity of power relations and social processes shaping maternal decision making processes and actions. It can add to the ways that three levels are

understood and illustrate some of the ways they interact to sustain or challenge lone mothers structural positions of inequality and understandings of difference / similarity. It is an exercise in setting out some of the sources of resources and constraints apparent from these women's accounts rather than adding up to an overall theory of social relations. As we shall see in the final section below where the policy implications are discussed, recognising these aspects of maternal experiences goes some way to developing an alternative policy agenda in supporting family life.

The broader cultural and material context:

The discussion above about the discursive context of lone motherhood and the relationship to processes of cultural recognition and difference forms part of the broader cultural context. Here, I would also like to add the role of normative guidelines and constructions of gender difference.

As discussed earlier in the literature review the concept of 'normative guideline' was developed by Finch and Mason (1996). I am using this concept here because it portrays several processes which were apparent within these experiences of motherhood. Firstly, there were some similarities in the discourses of motherhood and womanhood developed by the mothers' that appeared to present particular norms of family life and gender identity as taken for granted or desired. Secondly, it is the way these norms and principles were vague, were merely 'guidelines' and needed working out in practice that led to much diversity in the specific meaning and activities pursued.

The dominant normative guidelines in relation to motherhood appeared to be:

- Children are dependent and needy;
- Parents had primary responsibility for child-rearing;
- Child-rearing was primarily a private responsibility;
- Mothering is about meeting children's needs for development.

As normative guidelines these were either supported but negotiated as to what in practice they meant or they were rejected but this was always presented as a position of difference. So essentially, the norm is still recognised as the norm. The positions of difference that were asserted were a stress on meeting maternal needs as well as children's needs or in recognising children as independent autonomous agents. However, when a mother presented such values and justified them, they often saw them as in contrast to the dominant values and norms. This position of difference often emerges from their experiences that challenge the desirability of such normative guidelines. There is evidence therefore that these normative guidelines may be shifting and are resisted, but they also remain powerful forces guiding action.

These normative guidelines present several tensions if we consider the policy model of the adult worker model for lone mother headed families or the responsible mother who works in partnership with the state accessing professional support in times of need. Some of the mothers such as Sue or Lucinda, stressed the significance for their children of their personalised care and they restricted their labour market participation. Added to this a notion of the private responsibilities of parents constrained actions in taking up or accepting professional support. However, for others being responsible and the private nature of family responsibilities led to action to take up paid work in order to independently provide for children. Paid work was most powerfully justified as a desirable course of action if it could be closely connected to meeting children's needs as in the 'mother / worker integral' gendered moral rationality.

The consensus of maternal and paternal responsibilities to meet children's needs did not translate to a consensus as to what children's needs were. However, there are some clusters of values around security, nurturance, surveillance, protection, stimulation and so on. But the actual nature of children's needs was heavily shaped by the local context, personal notions of good motherhood and the relationship between a child and mother. Living in poverty or within localities that were sparse in public services and involved a high risk of crime or threatening behaviour led to a heightened sense of maternal surveillance and effort in monitoring children's needs. So we have the situation of Trisha and

Hazel, restricting their children's social activities, spending considerable amount of time in the household setting and restricting their labour market participation in order to monitor their children's welfare in the context of a number of perceived social risks to their wellbeing. Such a position adds up to an attempt to be good enough mothers and manage their structural locations. These are exactly the mothers targeted by New Labour's welfare to work and regeneration strategies. The essential theoretical point here is that these mothers' experiences and concerns are shaped by social contexts and vary. The complexity of negotiating and working out normative cultural guidelines about good motherhood is an essential part of the processes of decision making involved in taking up public support. There are also a number of policy implications of these cultural processes, which will be considered further later on.

The wider material context shaping mothers' agency is fundamentally about the gendered nature of social relations and structures of opportunity. The institutional and social resources available to these women in balancing sustainable paid work with motherhood responsibilities were sparse. It was only really those on higher incomes, with higher education qualifications, older children or fewer children, who came from more favourable class background who perceived they could cope with paid work and mothering. Many of these, however, envisaged some sources of insecurity or vulnerability that may arise in the future. It was the reinforcing nature of a range of resources such as childcare, human capital, social capital, perceptions of resourcefulness / capacities / abilities, flexible working practices, transport, in-work costs, income and living costs that contributed to mothers' marginalised material position. Although this study does endorse some of the current policy directions such as improved opportunities to take up training, higher education course, benefit run-ons, in-work benefits and resources for children, the current policy framework continues to neglect the severity of women's marginal position in the labour market and lack of support for child-rearing. A gendered analysis of women's position in the world of paid work and families remains a critical theoretical and policy intervention.

The local typology of risks, resources and opportunities:

Beyond these broader social processes it is possible to see a distinct role played by the local context. This can usefully be described as the 'local typology of risks, resources and opportunities'. Williams uses this phrase to signify the importance of the local context in how people negotiate and experience welfare relations (Williams 1999). This study shows how significant mothers' perceptions of this local typology is and how perceptions can vary even between mothers living in the same locality. It is important to see processes of individual subjectivity (which were also crucial the negotiation of normative guidelines) as embedded in a local context of relationships, values and resources. There was some diversity and tensions in mothers' accounts of what they felt were helpful resources, which enabled them to cope and participate in paid work.

The role of social networks and institutional support was significant. However, there can also be many risks and tensions in accessing the right kind of support from these resources. Some of these issues relate to the significance of the private nature of maternal responsibility and the stigma attached to accessing public support. However, others emerged from the mothers' experiences of forms of support and the nature of their actual relationships. While social networks, especially those between mothers and family members, can involve considerable flows of resources in the form of childcare, practical help, financial or a listening ear / advice giving, there may be a risk to one's privacy, sense of independence or autonomy in such flows. Social ties can be supportive and coercive. A concern with the trustworthiness of a friend, neighbour or family member was evident. The issue of the conditions placed on support from public services or mistrust of professional was also apparent in some of the mothers' accounts as they experienced a neglect of their perspectives of their needs.

Several of the mothers used or requested public services such as play facilities, accessible transport, appropriate childcare and adequate housing. But what added up to a good public service was important. Accessing the right type and quality of support for them was significant. The experience of the mothers who met up regularly at a local Sure Start family centre was particularly interesting as a sense of shared and collective reciprocal self-help seemed to be thriving. The

women here seemed to have a sense of ownership about this local resource and did not raise a concern with the conditionality of professional support to such an extent. Indeed this facility did provide resources such as a local café, part-time paid work, adult education and parenting information in a way that parents felt they had choice and control over accessing such support. Several of the initiatives were parent-led. But maintaining social networks required time and effort, and could increase the demands on a mother. Several evaluations are pursuing these questions about the role of local family centres and such discussions have informed the development of local children's centres.

Friendships and family ties were often based on a notion of reciprocity as several researchers in this area have argued (Finch and Mason 1996; Burns et al 2004). However, this drew many of the mothers into extensive ties of commitments and obligations as well as reciprocal relations of support. This was particularly prominent among mothers who had lived in an area for a longer period or lived in close proximity to other family members. Some of the mothers such as Melissa or Trisha were involved in caring for other family members such as her brother in Melissa's case and her sister in Trisha's case. Although the ties of dependency or support shifted between these family members, both of these mothers felt they were in the role of supporting other family members and these family members had a limited capacity to support them on several occasions.

In some cases mothers avoided establishing local social networks. Rasheene and Trisha, for different reasons, viewed local social networks as risky. Trisha felt her neighbours were untrustworthy and actively restricted her children's relations with them. Rasheene also did not trust the local community where many Asian families lived as she was attempting to flee domestic violence and this issue can be particularly controversial in this context. The role of normative guidelines were important in how a mother negotiated her local context of networks and resources. So, for example, Susan preferred to not visit friends on a regular basis or to generate family support through her social networks. She understood motherhood as a private responsibility and turned to her child's father as her main source of support. Introducing her children to several social networks was also seen as a risk to their needs for a stable routine based around the familiarity

of a domestic routine and family members. What is important here is that mothers were embedded in a local context of social networks and public support but that they negotiated these resources also in the context of normative guidelines and institutional availability.

The mothers' perceptions of the labour market and childcare opportunities in their locality were important factors in shaping labour market decisions. However, it was often the extent of several reinforcing factors such as the degree of other demands on them, their perception of children's needs, their perceptions of their capacities and competence that also played a part in decisions about paid work. Patricia, Beverley, Kimberley and Jane, for example, were unable to access the right childcare support for them. This was particularly in the context of working full-time, with a large family or working unsocial hours. Several of the mothers perceive a lack of employment opportunities that could fit with school hours, part-time hours and be sustainable financially. For these reasons, there needs to be more acknowledgement of the local context in policy interventions.

The local context: Individual perceptions and life trajectories:

The significance of mothers' perceptions of their individual capacities along with perceptions of the local typology of risks, resources and opportunities informed mothers' engagement with public services. The processes of individual meaning making and one's sense of one's biography had a key role in shaping the capacity to act. In decisions around being a mother and participation in the labour market it appears that perceptions of one's capacities, resources and 'resourcefulness' played a significant role. This can be demonstrated by the prominence of a theme around coping and capacities to cope. Capacity to cope, for example, was often justified on the basis of a capacity to be resourceful and adapt to changing experiences drawing on the skills developed in alternative life situations. So Kimberley, for example, presented her experiences of lone motherhood as similar to her experiences of childhood where not only did her mother raise her and her sister as a lone mother, she also contributed to the childcare of her sister. Kimberley could draw on her previous life experiences as a source of expertise and capacity to cope with her four children with little input from her children's

father. Kimberley also presented her gender identity as an 'independent' woman which related to her capacity to live independently from men. She felt she had the capacity to perform what she saw as 'man's work' around the house and could manage her income with few contributions from her children's father. Feeling able to cope is also probably enhanced by the wide range of social support Kimberley receives from her social networks. This forms part of the local typology of risks, resources and opportunities set out above, and here Kimberley can draw on her family networks and a friendship network. She refers to her friends, whom are other mums living in the area, that she meets daily at the local family centre as 'a home from home'. Kimberley also sees herself as having the capacity to participate in the labour market and is willing to do so. However, it is her preference for informal childcare for her four children and her perception that no such childcare is available or affordable, that prevents her from taking up paid work. Maintaining her daily networks and children's lives is a priority for Kimberley. She draws on a sense of being able to cope, being resourceful and having resources to draw on. Being resourceful, she seeks out local courses that can be undertaken while her children are at school and is attempting to build up her knowledge and skills for a future goal of returning to paid work.

Many of the mothers were similar to Kimberley in feeling that they could not cope with the demands of balancing paid work with lone motherhood. Sarah had previous experience of undertaking paid work that she felt was a stressful time of her life. Rather than taking up paid work, she is resourceful in drawing on her capacities to let out a room in her house or undertakes part-time cash in hand evening work to supplement her income. Several of the mothers had developed such coping strategies to managing their incomes and resources. Perceptions and skills in coping could involve reflections on previous life experiences where a mother successfully or unsuccessfully coped with the demands on her. Essentially it is the role of individual subjectivity and perceptions of agency that need acknowledging here. Individual constructions and understandings of one's life experiences and personal capacities and competence seemed to play a central role in how the mothers' negotiated their actions.

The Policy Implications of the Study:

The policy implications of this study emerge from the lack of recognition of the complex nature of lone mothers' subjective experiences and the relationship between the individual, local and wider structural context. The current landscape of policy initiatives in relation to family life and family support do run the risk of offering a limited range of support and present mothers with some conditionalities that they may not agree with. These points will be expanded on below.

The accounts of lone motherhood generated within this study, stressed dimensions of capacities as well as commitments in engaging with current policy objectives. Mothers were concerned about the morality and legitimacy of their actions as well as their capacities, competence, resources and abilities to pursue a line of action such as supporting their child's education or development or taking up paid work. Being a mother involved considerations of what was right and proper (as noted by Williams 2004; Finch and Mason 1996; Smart and Neale 1998; Duncan and Edwards 1999), as well as one's commitment to others, and one's capacities and competences. Above I argued that individual life experiences, local relationships and resources, localities and their infrastructures as well as broader cultural understandings of 'good motherhood' and power relations shaped these perceptions of capacity and commitment. The local, family and individual context is important as well as the broader cultural and institutional setting. However, as we saw it was more challenging for a mother to sustain her commitments in the context of uncertain capacities (for example in Melissa's story of giving up her higher education course, Patricia's story of giving up paid work and Jane's story of changing employers). All these mothers were committed to maintaining their training or paid work but felt unable to do so.

This role of the perceptions of commitments and capacities in shaping mothers' agency has implications for current policy directions. The agenda would be one of developing social policies that could offer a range of opportunities for lone mothers to expand their capacities and competences as well as recognising their

understandings of their responsibilities, good motherhood and multiple commitments. Key elements of such a set of policies are deliberated below.

Local services:

The services developed need be locally accessible and appreciate the local context of risks, resources and opportunities. In essence this requires the continued extension of an integrated locally responsive set of services in which there are versions within the Sure Start model and the Children's Centre model. However, in practice these initiatives are still sustaining a postcode lottery of services as local partnerships implement their national policy in diverse ways. Input from mothers and an infrastructure that facilitates the local definition of needs is crucial.

Personalised and flexible support:

Assessments of public support need to begin from mothers' own assessments of their needs and circumstances. The moves towards a more individualised form of assessment for welfare support such as that encapsulated in the Personal Adviser for the New Deal for Lone Parents scheme could be expanded in family support services. Taking supporting families as a primary policy objective along with the emphasis on sustainable labour market participation requires a system of personalised support that is offered on the basis of choice. For example, a central figure could operate as a personal adviser in a number of institutional or community settings. A personal adviser can be situated in a school or workplace with the remit to provide flexible advice or referral to the array of voluntary, private or public family support services available. Possibilities for such an adviser could potentially evolve within the remit of local family resource centres or children's centres with outreach and family support capacities. What is important though is that support emerges from an understanding and dialogue between professionals and mothers' about their perspectives of their needs.

Steps into sustainable paid work:

This thesis presents a case that lone mothers have multiple support needs in relation to moving into sustainable employment. Current support runs the risk of not only putting mothers' under pressure to work but also only providing support

for those with less complex support needs or providing opportunities that sustain poverty albeit of an in-work nature. This thesis supports the arguments put across by Sevenhuijsen (2002) and Williams (2004) in recognising that paid work may not be the preferred or appropriate action for many mothers. Not only is there a need to recognise the claims that carers have to citizenship as carers, contributing to social wellbeing and nurturance, there needs to be several pathways into paid work that provide secure opportunities for enhancing one's income and skills. Here a redefinition of work to include voluntary or domestic caring work is a possible policy strategy. These sorts of argument can also lead to the importance of some sort of basic income for all citizens.

With a concern to ensure mothers' benefit from participation in the labour market there needs to be further efforts towards providing many steps into paid work. Expanding experiences of successful achievements through meaningful work experience or mentoring are examples of such options. These activities are being realised in several New Deal programs (Woodfield and Finch 1999). Supporting opportunities to take up training that will lead to higher status qualifications seems another area that requires attention and expansion.

Recognising varied expressions of citizenship:

This points raised above also involves a need to recognise varied expressions of citizenship. This is in comparison to the emphasis on paid work and parental responsibility. Through maintaining one's wellbeing, nurturing social ties, undertaking voluntary work and caring for children, many of the mothers' were making valuable social contributions. A society sustained by the adult worker model or authoritative parents endeavouring to only control and educate their children, would be one that runs the risk of neglecting the importance of choices, fun, friendship networks, caring ties and wellbeing in our lives. Recognising and rewarding the social reproduction and regeneration of society as well as the economic is an important shift that is needed within policy debates.

The emphasis on parent-child relations as one that is only about lines of responsibility and accountability is one example of a policy approach that runs counter to such recognition. While parents on the whole accept and place much

effort in meeting their responsibilities these are in practice negotiated alongside alternative family concerns such as the desire for harmonious, democratic or enjoyable family relations. Inflexible enforcement of parental authority can disempower children in their opportunities to develop capacities to act for themselves and to learn from their initiative. Recognition issues also then involve the need to move beyond a set of problematising discourses that disempowers children and parents, towards recognition of parental and child assets and strengths.

Family as a private responsibility remains:

Family as a private responsibility seems to remain as a significant family value although policy agendas have moved towards more public intervention. The policy implications set out above are very much involved in a project that will generate conditions that maybe more conducive to a trusting relationship between public service and families. There is much evidence in this thesis and from other studies that at present, the relationship between families and the state is one fraught with tensions.

One further policy direction that could engender a more positive relationship and culture of public support and shared responsibility could be to continue the emphasis on providing resources for children and parents as distinct service groups. Providing resources for children of all ages, that were a matter of choice and accessible at the local level (such as play resources / discounted services / social activities / avenues for political participation) are important steps toward support families. Further providing support for parents with an equal element of choice and accessibility could facilitate the recognition of their support needs in the context of the multiple demands in their lives not merely in relation to being a responsible parent.

Dialogues about children's needs that recognise and include mothers', fathers' and children's perspectives:

Notions of good motherhood and the 'good childhood' abound in policy discourses and interventions. The role of professional and scientific evidence in shaping policy tends to give more voice and credence to professional and

research definitions of children's needs. While this study found that mothers shared similar concerns as indeed professionals and policy makers do about children's wellbeing and development, in practice it was the multiple, complex and situated nature of a particular child's set of needs that required action and negotiation. While health or education professionals are primarily concerned in one aspect of a child's development or set of needs, a mother is engaged in a holistic project with a past, present and future dimension.

Therefore debates about children's wellbeing were not merely a matter of economic rationality, maternal instinct, maternal love, or taking responsibility. Key questions and uncertainties preoccupied many of the mothers, such as:

What are my child/ren's needs in the present and future?

What are my child/ren's needs in relation to a specific context?

Who is responsible and competent in meeting these needs?

What are the essential features of a caring response?

How should I control my child? Or nurture discipline in the context of our life circumstances?

With whom can I or should I share these responsibilities?

These debates and deliberations involve moral considerations about the right thing to do as well as a consideration of maternal and others' competence as childcarers. The potentially complex nature of being a good mother requires more public debate that includes maternal perspectives.

Final comment:

In this conclusion, I have set out the methodological, theoretical and policy implications of this study. These conclusions represent an attempt to bring together an in-depth analysis of the negotiation of individual experiences and embedded social worlds and an interpretive / qualitative research design in a policy relevant way. The overall argument presented is one where lone mothers negotiate a complex set of risks, resources and opportunities that are embedded in wider cultural and material processes. Recognising and acting on the many

sources of constraints leads to several shifts and expansions in current New Labour social policy.

Appendix One

Interview Schedule 1.

Introduce the research

Explain the research information sheet

Explain about confidentiality and anonymity

Agree time

Sign consent form

Permission to tape interview.

1. How many children have you got? (Ages/ children not living with them/ schools)
2. How old were you when you had your first child?
3. Can you tell me about your life then? What was going on for you then? (partnerships, employment, family, education);
4. Would you call yourself a lone parent? (terms? Meanings?)
5. What does it mean to you to be a lone parent?
6. How did you become a lone parent? (relationship separation or single?)
7. Did becoming a lone parent change your life in any way? (resources / housing/ loss / continuities ?)
8. What is it like parenting alone? (follow up on issues)
9. What are the good things about being on your own? What are the things you are less satisfied about?
10. Do you think parenting would be different with a partner? (live in partner or not?)
11. Could you tell me about a typical day for your family?
12. What do you enjoy about being a parent? What do you find more challenging? (prompt for issues)
13. What things do you think are important about being a parent?
14. What relationships are most significant to you? (family / friends/ work)
15. Do you meet up with other parents/ mothers in the area? (what for? Where?)
16. Do you feel supported? (by whom? What for ?)
17. Do your family or friends help you out with your family?
18. Ask about New Deal – heard of it? Are you currently working? (what is that like? – support, activities, childcare, balancing work – home life)
19. Do you plan to take up paid work? Could you tell me about your reasons for this?
20. What are your priorities for the next few months?

Leave card.

Appendix Two

Interview Topic (Topic reminder) Guide 2:

Introduce the research the research – interested in their story, what matters to them in their family life and how they see things;

Explain the research information sheet

Explain about confidentiality and anonymity

Agree time

Permission to tape interview

Sign consent form

1. Background information:

Children – ages;

Respondent – age, education, employment, lived in the area long?

2. Becoming a mother:

Partnership?

Employment?

Housing?

Friendships and family networks?

Impact on life?

3. Becoming a lone mother?

Partnership separation?

Housing?

How did you feel, before / after separation?

How change you life?

Responses from others?

Children's experiences?

Anxieties? Benefits?

4. Being a mother:

What matters to you?

What do you feel are your responsibilities?

What, in your opinion, is a good mother?

Typical day?

Know other mums? Contact with other mums – ask further..

5. Income and Finances:

Income sources / level

Help from family / friends?

Do you feel you are on a low income?

New Deal – awareness? Relevance? Experiences?

Paid work – a priority? Type of work, type of support, income?

6. Support:

Who do you turn to for support? E.G.?

Support - nature of support needed.

Friends and support

Family and support

Professional / local groups?

Ex-partners? Partners?

Do you feel well supported?

Would you like the Government or local council to support you more?

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